Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Mission of Mercy
Scripture: Luke 9:51-56
Code: 42-132

What a privilege it is to know our God as revealed in Jesus Christ. God is nowhere as clearly manifest as He is in Christ. All of the Old Testament references to God, all of the Old Testament descriptions of God are in some ways obscured to us, veiled to us and they become clearer to us in the person of Jesus Christ. God is best seen in Christ. And what a privilege it is for us to be, as it were, walking with Christ through the years of His ministry by our study of the gospel of Luke. Let's open our Bibles to Luke chapter 9. These are long chapters with short verses, taking us through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. They are rich beyond description.

And as we come to Luke chapter 9, this time, it is verses 51 through 56 that draws our attention, verses 51 through verse 56. I'm going to read this to you as it is in the New American Standard before me. You will notice in verses 55 and verse 56 that there are some notes in the margin that indicate that not all of the manuscripts have a couple of statements down in verse 55 and 56, but they are included in the New American Standard translation, as well as the New King James. There is some indication in old manuscripts they should be there. It's not my responsibility to debate all of that. We'll include comments about them in the text as they appear.

Verse 51 of Luke 9: "It came about when the days were approaching for His ascension that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem. And He sent messengers on ahead of Him and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. Then they did not receive Him because He was journeying with His face toward Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this they said, 'Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' But He turned and rebuked them and said, 'You do not know what kind of spirit you're 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."

If I were to entitle this passage, I would entitle it, "A Lesson on Mercy," "A Lesson on Mercy." And though the word "mercy" does not appear here, mercy itself appears. The word "mercy" is a word filled with loveliness. To say that someone is merciful is to pay them about as high a compliment as could possibly be paid because mercy conveys the idea of being loving, being compassionate, being tender, being forgiving, being selfless, caring, protective. "Mercy" is a beautiful word and to designate

a person as a merciful person is to say the best that could be said about someone.

On the other hand, the word “mercy” is further enriched by how we use its opposite. When we want to describe someone as the worst we might say that that person is merciless. The word “merciless” is usually reserved for epical serial killers and mass murderers and dictators who commit genocide. Merciless people are vicious, vengeful, deadly, destructive, who feel only hate and evil toward others. And the way we use merciless only enhances the way we use merciful. The best that could ever be said about a person humanly and even divinely is that he or she is merciful.

And that's the lesson from the Lord today. We are, by the way, with Christ in His school of discipleship. We're walking along the road with Christ as we have been for many, many months. I think one of the reasons that the Lord unfolded the whole divine, redemptive plan in Israel is because the climate is so perfect He could do everything outside. One of God's small purposes in creating that land with that wonderfully sort of benign climate, very much like southern California, almost parallel, is so that Jesus could move freely with the gospel and the people would be outside, as He was outside, and so that life was simply a matter of movements and experiences along the highways and byways and paths and hillsides and valleys and fields and lakes and rivers of Israel, because Jesus wanted to teach out of life experience. Every field provided a parable; every...every vineyard another parable. In every town and village there was an experience, or an issue that allowed Him to demonstrate His spiritual power, His divine power and gave Him opportunity to teach off of life experience. That's really what discipleship is. When I'm asked, "How does discipleship work?" the answer is very simple. Discipling someone is walking them through life and teaching them to perceive all of its experiences with a divine insight. That's what discipleship is. It's not a class on Thursday night, or any other night. It's not two hours of reading a book. It's interpreting life with the mind of Christ. And if you want to be discipled then just walk with Jesus through life.

And He took every experience that the disciples had and turned it into an education about how He thought about everything. And here in this village of Samaria, He finds a perfect opportunity to teach a very short lesson but a riveting and unforgettable one about mercy, about mercy. And they had just completed a lesson on humility, verses 46 to 50. He had taught them the deadly dangers of pride and instructed them by that to be humble. And this is a perfect way to follow that up because only the humble are merciful. Proud people tend to be without mercy and the prouder they are, the more merciless they become. So from the lesson on humility to the lesson on mercy is not a big jump.

These are spiritual virtues that the disciples of Jesus, the apostles of Jesus had to have. They not only were taught by Jesus, they were manifest by Him. He was the perfect example. He who was the

humblest of all, He who came the lowest from the highest, He was also the most merciful of all. He who was perfect righteousness and truth was also perfect mercy. Mercy is exalted all through Scripture.

You know, it was such a lovely word that people used to name their daughters Mercy. Rare anymore. But let me just give you a little bit of a broad picture of mercy. Mercy is exalted in Scripture. And I want you to understand how highly it is exalted. There are many virtues that the Scripture exalts and affirms. But mercy goes all the way to the top of the scale. Let me show you why. Proverbs 3:3: Listen to this, "Let not mercy and truth forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart." Mercy is ranked with truth. That in itself is a very important and instructive thought. We know how high God ranks His truth, right? Psalm 138:2, "God has exalted His Word to the very height of His name. Nothing is more important than divine truth."

Certainly my life is a reflection of a conviction that the truth of God matters most. This church is living evidence of commitment to the exaltation of divine truth. But Scripture says, "Tie truth and mercy around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart." Mercy ranks with truth. There's nothing more dangerous in some ways than truth without mercy because there's no space, there's no patience, there's no gentleness. You have to speak the truth in love, the apostle Paul said. Well that's essentially what this is saying, only it's bigger than love, it's you proclaim the truth but binding to the truth a heart of mercy. Mercy is exalted to the degree that truth is exalted. God is true and God is merciful. And we know very well that God's mercy is as great as His truth. If it were not, His truth would crush us instantaneously. So mercy is exalted. Having given my life to the truth, always passionate about the truth, the prayer alongside that is, "Lord, may I in my passion for the truth never be guilty of lacking mercy toward those who don't know it, don't understand it, don't believe it, or haven't grown into it." So ministry should be the truth tempered always with mercy.

In Hosea, the prophet says, "Hear the Word of the Lord," chapter 4 verse 1, "Hear the Word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land." Here's the charge, "There is no truth or mercy." And again, truth and mercy are linked. I don't know if you ever thought of them as linked, but they are, because mercy's always tempered by truth. And I need to switch that around, truth is always tempered by mercy. In other words, you have mercy but it's connected to the truth, you have truth but it's never separated from mercy. This is the beautiful balance that God requires. And the indictment from the prophet Hosea, there's no truth or mercy, is followed by this, "Therefore the land will mourn and everyone who dwells there will waste away." It's not just the truth; it's the truth and mercy. It's not just mercy; it's mercy and the truth. And listen to this, truth is not only linked to mercy, but so is justice or righteousness. Hosea 12:6, "So you by the help of your God return, observe mercy and justice." Zechariah 7:9, "Execute true justice and show mercy." So you have truth and mercy, and you have justice and mercy. Truth, we know God is committed and

concerned about truth. Justice or righteousness we know God is committed to, but God is equally committed to mercy. His truth comes tempered with mercy. His justice comes tempered with mercy. So we have to understand how high mercy ranks. And just as God is a God of mercy, so we are to be a people of God who are merciful.

Now mercy then is exalted in the Scripture and you can see that in just that simple way. Secondly, mercy is beneficial. Mercy is beneficial. Proverbs 11:17, "The merciful man does good for his own soul." You want to do well for your own soul? You want to have a happy heart? You want to live with peace and joy and a sense of calm? Be merciful. The rest of the verse says, "He who is cruel troubles his own flesh." You want to live with guilt and fear and anxiety and torment and dread and worry about what people are going to do to you, then be cruel and you should stay up at night wondering when your enemy is going to appear. But if you live a merciful life, you have nothing to fear. It's beneficial to be kind, tender-hearted, compassionate, sympathetic and loving. That's all bound up in mercy.

So mercy is exalted. Mercy is beneficial. Thirdly, mercy is godlike. Never are you more like God then when you're merciful. The Psalms emphasize this. I was just reading yesterday Psalm 36, which emphasizes the mercy of God. Listen to what Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, said in Luke 1:78. He said, "Because of the tender mercy of our God comes the knowledge of salvation and forgiveness." And Zacharias understood that God was tender in His mercy and that's why there is forgiveness and that's why there is salvation. Also in Luke 6:36, a direct statement: "Be merciful just as your Father also is merciful." You as the children of God are to manifest the life of God, the characteristics of God. And one of them is mercy. God, says Ephesians 2:4, is rich in mercy. Don't be stingy in mercy, be rich in mercy. It's wonderful to have someone say that you’re strong in the truth. It's equally necessary that someone say, "And you carry that truth with a heart of mercy." Truth can be harsh and brutal, and sometimes the more refined people's understanding of the truth is, the more careful their understanding of what the truth is, the more precise the understanding of the truth is, the more nuances in their theology they have settled permanently, the less mercy is available to those who are ignorant. But even God, who is perfect truth and perfect justice, is also perfect mercy.

Mercy is exalted in Scripture and in reality. Mercy is beneficial. Mercy is godlike. Mercy is required. That's the fourth one, mercy is required. Colossians 3:12, "Therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies." This is a command. Put on tender mercies. We are commanded to be merciful. That means to be kind, humble, meek, patient. Another thing to think about when you think about mercy: Mercy is reciprocal, mercy is reciprocal. Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." You want mercy, give it and you'll get it back. You'll get it back. You'll get it back from the Lord and you'll also get it back from the people to whom you show mercy.

Mercy is exalted in Scripture. It is beneficial to the soul. It is godlike. It is commanded. It is reciprocal. And one other, this one negative, it is necessary to avoid judgment. If you want God to move into your life and chasten you, then lack mercy. Listen to James 2:13, "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy." That can't be any more direct. Judgment, speaking of God, coming to chasten is without mercy. God will show no mercy to a merciless person. And then the next line I love, "Mercy triumphs over judgment." You want to avoid chastening, be merciful. Mercy trumps judgment. This is mercy. It's a magnificent reality. And we have received this massive mercy of forgiveness. Do you remember the story as Jesus told it? The servant who was forgiven the unpayable debt, went out and strangled a man and threw him in prison because he owed him a small amount. And they called that man before the judge as if to say, "How dare you receive this great mercy and not extend a small mercy to someone inferior to you." We are to be known as a people of mercy. And it's always been in my heart through all the years of ministry that there would be an attitude and a heart of tender mercy and patience and long-suffering toward people while at the same time an unwavering commitment to proclaim the truth.

The Old Testament has a couple of words that describe mercy. *Racham* and *chanan* are the Hebrew words, sometimes translated “mercy,” sometimes translated “compassion,” but they are the words that describe mercy. The New Testament has a word, *eleos*. That is the New Testament word for mercy. Whatever the word, let me tell you what it means just to sum it up. Here's the definition. Mercy is condescending love reaching out to meet the need of someone without thought of their merit or demerit. Let me say that again: Condescending love reaching to meet the need of someone without thought of their merit or demerit, whether they deserve it or not. That's mercy. It has in it pity. The Old Testament words are sometimes translated that way. It has in it compassion. It has in it the idea that a superior withholds the infliction of some pain or suffering or judgment on an inferior. It has in it the idea of the compassionate grace that does good to someone even when they don't deserve it. I suppose the supreme New Testament illustration of mercy is the prodigal son, wouldn't you say? Who had taken and wasted all of his substance, dissipated his life, used up in profligate and wretchedly wicked ways his inheritance from his father, thus as it were demeaning his father, mocking or blaspheming his father. He went off and lived a riotous way, the Bible says, and wasted all his substance in wine, women and song. And ended up feeding pigs and crawled back and wanted only to become a servant again in his father's house, but his father kissed him and put a robe on him and a ring on his finger and held a party and had a celebration. And that's the grandiose essence of mercy. It's lavish. And there's a wonderful illustration of mercy in the Old Testament in 2 Kings, chapter 6, you can read it for yourself, where somebody expects to be killed and instead in 2 Kings 6:20 to 23 God says, "Don't kill them, make a feast for them." Mercy.

Well that's really what we see in this story. It's a simple story. We'll actually get through it in the next few minutes this morning. But as we look at it, I want us to go to school, OK? This is class time and Jesus is our teacher and He's teaching out of the life experience. Put yourself back, put your sandals on, get your robe, shuffle around in the dirt a little, we're walking with Jesus, we're on the road with Him and He's going to teach us. You know, it just brings me to the point of saying all this modern effort to bring the Bible into the current scene, to contemporize the Bible, to update the Bible, to talk in terms and with illustrations that are modern really is destructive to the intent of Scripture. It was written in ancient times and intended to maintain its ancient character. That's why a true translator can only translate the words of the Bible. To change them, to update them is a violation of what a translator is to do. It's an intrusion into the truth of God, into the sanctity of His Word. The idea is not to update the Bible. It's not to bring the Bible forward. The idea is to take you back and have you walk with Jesus, and that's what we're doing. So let's join the scene. And as we do, we're going to get three truths about mercy, three truths about mercy.

Number one, mercy is the heart of Christ's mission. Mercy is the heart of Christ's mission. These are implied here. Verse 51, "And it came about when the days were approaching for His ascension that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem." Now this is obviously a verse that doesn't use the word mercy, but it's implied. It's not explicit, it's implicit. Just follow the thought here. The verse opens, "And it came about..." that's a time indefinite statement, it just tells us some time passed since the last episode in verses 46 to 50, probably not a long time, just another day in this period of time in the life and ministry of Jesus. But this is a transition because it says, "When the days were approaching for His leaving, for His lifting up, *analmpsis*, for His ascension, it's translated.

Now I want you to know something, folks, this is a huge change, huge. Up to now everything in Luke's gospel has been focusing on His coming, on His coming. The prophecies in the first chapter, the angel's announcement of John the Baptist, the forerunner, then the angel comes to Mary, the announcement to Mary, the meeting with Elizabeth, the genealogies. And all of a sudden He comes and He's born and the stories around His birth, the shepherds the wise men. And then He comes to the temple at twelve and all those years go by and finally He embarks upon His ministry and He comes into Judea first, then He comes to Galilee and He's there well over a year in His ministry. And He's come, the Messiah's come, the Messiah's come and He's going from place to place, town to town, village to village. And His coming reaches its pinnacle at the Mount of Transfiguration in this chapter, verses 28 to 36. He's come all the way to the peak of revelation and there on the mount, Peter, James and John see Him transfigured, they see that He is the eternal Son of God, He is the glory of God, the Shekinah incarnate and they also see Moses and Elijah and they are there and they see the fullness of His revelation, His full coming. And after that, that's the high point, they start down the mountain, verse 37, and things begin to change. Up to that point it was about His coming. From

now on it's about His going. It's about His going. Now He sets His face to go to Jerusalem. The whole tenor of the gospel of Luke is going to dramatically change. Up to this point we've been talking about He's the Messiah, He's revealing Himself as the Messiah. All the evidence is there. Look at His power. Look at His miracles. And now what we're going to see is He's headed to the cross, He's headed to the cross. He's headed to the cross. Look at the hostility, look at the hatred, look at the vitriol, look at the plots. Look at the plans. Watch what's happening. Up to now it's been His coming and from now on it's going to be His going. He was literally moving toward His exaltation, moving toward the revelation of His full Messiahship. And now He's going to move to His humiliation.

The Galilean ministry is over after over a year, a year of miracles and preaching the good news of forgiveness, the good news of the kingdom of God, and less than a year of His life actually remains, less than a year, months. And these months are really important. They're the months of going toward the cross and there are many months. This is important time because as He moves through the humiliation, having moved through the exaltation, He has been teaching His disciples who He was, who He was, who He was. Earlier in chapter 9 they said, "We get it, You're the Christ of God." And then the Mount of Transfiguration and they see it and in a sense His coming is complete because they know exactly who He is. And they're ready for the crown. They're ready for heavenly glory. They're ready for the kingdom. But He says, "Wait a minute." Chapter 9 verse 22, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, the scribes, be killed, raised up the third day." Verse 44, "Let these words sink in your ears, the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men."

Wait a minute! You saw the glory but the glory is not yet possible because before the crown there has to be the cross, before the glory there has to be the suffering. Before the exaltation, there has to be the humiliation. This is really important teaching time. Now that they know who He is, now they know His power and the revelation of His person, now they have to understand His death. And so now we're going to go through the training of the twelve and in these months as He takes them through, as it were, the valley of humiliation with certainly some moments of wondrous glory, but as they go through the time of humiliation, He teaches them all the things they need to know. And this training, by the way, goes on from chapter 9, verse 51 to chapter 19, verse 27. That whole section is the training of the twelve as Jesus moves toward Jerusalem.

Now Jerusalem is only a couple of days walk from Galilee. So this is not like we're going straight there. It wouldn't take months to get there. This is a meandering path. He's out of Galilee. He goes back later. He goes over here, over there. He makes a couple of short trips to Jerusalem. But it all is focused ultimately on ending up in Jerusalem on that Passover time of His own execution. And all the way along the miracles that He does, the things that He does in His teaching are to equip this group

of twelve to be the first generation of gospel preachers in the world.

Now in verse 51 it's identified as when the days were approaching for His ascension, specific days, specific days designed by whom? God. “They were approaching” is *sumplro*, fulfilled. And you see that word “fulfilled” so often in connection with the plan of God. He said something and it's fulfilled. He plans something and it's fulfilled. This is *sumplro*, really fulfilled, thoroughly, completely fulfilled. Jesus operated on a divine timetable. There were times when Jesus said, His hour had not yet come. And then there was another time when He said, "My hour has come." He operated not on a human schedule or a human timetable, but on God's timetable. And He knew that the days were approaching, the fulfillment was coming when He would *analmpsis*, be lifted up. Only some months left, time to crank up the instruction of the twelve and time now to progress through suffering and sorrow.

Now what is this ascension? Look at it, verse 51, it's the word, as I said, *analmpsis*. It's only used here in the Bible. It means to lift up, to take up. Some think it could be the cross. John 3, as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, so shall the Son of Man be lifted up. John 12:32, "If I be lifted up, I'll draw all men to Myself." Is He looking at the cross? Is He thinking about the cross? Is that what He has in mind? Well the translators must have had something other than that in thought when they used the word “ascension.” And I think there's a reason for that. If you go back to verse 31, you remember that up on the mountain at the transfiguration when Moses and Elijah appeared in glory, they were talking with Jesus and they were speaking of His departure, His exodus. And it is that departure, not the cross, but the final departure from the earth that Jesus has in view. It is, John 17, where Jesus says, look, He says to the Father in His prayer, “I glorified You on earth, now glorify Me in heaven with the glory I had with You before the world began." I'm ready to come back, Father, is what He said, I'm ready to come back. It is what Hebrews 12 calls the joy that was set before Him, and that's why He endured the cross and the shame. He despised the shame. He thought little of the shame because He could see past the cross to the joy set before Him in His ascension when He was lifted up and set at the right hand of God and given a name, the name Lord, which is above every name that at that name every all should bow in heaven and earth and under the earth. Jesus looked all the way to heavenly glory but He knew the path was through humiliation. He could tell, thirty-two plus years on earth. Thirty-two years, you could say, of coming, and now a few months of going. Thirty two years to...to reveal Himself; a few months to go through suffering. And it says in verse 51, "He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem." Resolutely set His face, *striz*, fixed it. And He had to do that because it wasn't easy to do. There had to be self-discipline, there had to be conviction. There had to be resolve to go there. Even at the garden when He was being tempted by Satan and He said, "If possible, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless not My will but Yours be done," shows the resolve to go through the suffering, the rejection and even the execution and worse, the wrath of God on Him in His death. The resolve of Jesus is unwavering and here's where it starts. The coming is

over, the going has begun.

Now all of that to say this, look, folks, why was He doing that? He had already been revealed as the Lord of glory. Why then after that revelation of the transfiguration, why go through all of that suffering? And the answer is because He was on a mission of what? Mercy; and mercy required a cross. His mission was a mission of mercy. Jude called it the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. He was headed to Jerusalem on a mission of mercy for undeserving sinners. And, beloved, ours is a ministry of mercy, isn't it? Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:1 says, "We have this ministry by mercy." And it is a ministry of mercy. The disciples needed to understand that. His whole life was not just about coming and revealing glory. It was about going through the cross for mercy's sake. Mercy is the heart of Christ's mission.

Number two, mercy is extended to all. Mercy is extended to all. This flows out of this account. Verse 52, He sent messengers on ahead of Him. They're leaving Galilee. The Galilean ministry is over. It's been going on for over a year. It's over now. They've had their opportunity. Where are they going? They're headed toward Jerusalem in a meandering fashion for months. But the first place it says they went was they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him; of all places, the Samaritans. This illustrates what Luke tells us so much about the ministry of Jesus and that is that it was extensive, it was expansive, it went beyond the conventional limitations. Matthew focuses his gospel on the Jews. Jesus is King of the Jews, the rejection of the Jews, etc. Luke is expansive. Luke embraces the world. Luke knocks down all the conventional walls. In the Magnificat of Mary in Luke chapter 1, Mary celebrates the blessing of God upon the Jews. But in the blessing of Simeon at the temple of the child Jesus, Simeon celebrates the salvation of the Gentiles. So early on in this gospel we know from Luke's account that this is a Messiah who has come to Jew and Gentile and Jesus when He goes to the synagogue in Nazareth preaches that great sermon out of Luke 61, He says, "Salvation is not for Jews, salvation is for the poor, prisoners, blind, and oppressed." Anyone who is destitute just like in the Old Testament when God went to a pagan, Gentile widow in Zarephath and also God delivered a Syrian Gentile terrorist named Naaman. Luke features the expansiveness of God's redemptive mercy. Luke also reminds us extensively of how Jesus hung around tax collectors and prostitutes and criminals and riff-raff, needy people. Luke writes about lepers and the demonized and the diseased and the dead and women and thieves and the fringes of society, and even further — as we'll see in the chapters ahead of us — the poor, the handicapped, the blind, and even children. Jesus just shattered all the stereotypes. The rabbis didn't want to pay attention to any of those. Jesus cared for those of low status, all ages, all genders, all races, offering divine mercy to everybody. At the same time that the Pharisees and the scribes, according to Matthew 23:23, paid no attention to justice or mercy, Jesus broke all the conventional stereotypes of religion.

And so, He has to train His twelve to this expansive proclamation. And He has to teach them about mercy beyond the borders. The Jews had no mercy for children, the leaders. They had little mercy for women. They had no mercy for Gentiles. And of all people, they hated Samaritans. Jews generally going from Galilee down to Judea, Jerusalem, wouldn't even walk through Samaria, they'd go all the way around, cross the Jordan twice, just to avoid going through there because it was a defiled, unclean place. Now we have some history that indicates some of them went through there, but they went through there at some risk, carrying their own food so they wouldn't have to eat at the hands of the Samaritans and some of them, Josephus says, were actually murdered on the way through. This was typical Middle Eastern tribal hostility that we see even today. Samaritans, I remind you, were a mixed race, semi-pagan offspring of Israelites from the northern kingdom who were left behind when the northern kingdom was taken into Assyrian captivity. They were left there. They intermarried with pagans who were loyal to the Assyrian king so they were half breeds. They had abandoned their Jewish roots and heritage. They had absorbed paganism. They feared the Lord, 2 Kings 17:33 says they feared the Lord, yet served their own gods. They were amalgam of race and amalgam of religion. They had their own worship at a place called Mount Gerizim, although their temple had been destroyed in 128 by a man named John Hyrcanus so they had no temple but they still had their own religion, full of spirit, void of truth, mongrel race, mongrel religion, deemed unclean, hated by the Jews. But it was to a Samaritan woman that Jesus first revealed His messiahship. Remember John 4, the woman at the well? And did you know that Jesus made a Samaritan the hero of one of His most wonderful stories? The story called, "The Good Samaritan," which was a rebuke to the Jewish leaders, because, you remember, the rabbis and the Jewish leaders passed by and didn't help the man. And later the gospel was commissioned to go to Samaria, Acts 1:8. Go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria.

The Lord Jesus never had a problem with extending the borders of mercy. And so He sent messengers on ahead of Him. He had to arrange at least thirteen of them, and probably more if any of the seventy who were sort of ordained and commissioned in chapter 10 verse 1 happened to be along. We don't know what the total number was but at least twelve apostles and Jesus. They needed a place to stay. So they sent the messengers, some of the apostles had to make arrangements for them in the village. And there...this you see again the implied mercy of Jesus, go where no one goes. Go where Jewish religion will not go. Go where hatred exists. You know, you can be merciful easily to the people in your little group. You can be merciful to the people around you that you're comfortable with. The idea here is to extend that mercy to those you're not whoever they are, whatever race, whatever religion. Yes the truth is important, it's absolutely critical. But along with the truth comes mercy. Jesus was the living truth but He was also living mercy and He went to the half breeds and the outcasts and the mongrels and those who had distorted the Scriptures and misrepresented God and worshiped idols. He went to the most socially despised group and He showed them mercy.

So mercy is at the center of His ministry and it's at the circumference of His ministry. It's the heart of His ministry and it's the extent of His ministry. And a third and final point, mercy is extended toward the ignorant. Mercy is extended toward the ignorant. Verse 53, they didn't receive Him. That's too bad. The village said, "We don't want Him here. You can't come here. We don't want you in this village." I'm sure that the messengers, whoever they were of the apostles, went, said, "Look, we have a group coming into town and we need to tell you about this group. Twelve of us are preachers, but one of us is God. Now we'd like you guys to clean the joint up and have something for us because we're bringing God to town." Sure. Obviously the Samaritans didn't know anything about Jesus Christ. They...whatever the apostles may have told them, they remained unimpressed. And so they rejected Him. They didn't receive Him, deliberately rejecting Him. "No, you can't come to our town. We're not going to make provisions for you." And, of course, that would be...that would be typical of the way they would have treated Jews anyway. And Jews wouldn't have expected it, they would have slept off the road somewhere and brought their own food, they didn't expect hospitality from Samaritans. It would be a rare day that a village would offer that. And the disciples were probably a little kind of confused in their minds saying, "Why is He even asking us to do this because we know what they're going to say," and when they said it, it still ticked off James and John in particular. And so in verse 54 they react.

But before we see their reaction, back to verse 53, why didn't they receive Him? Because they didn't like the theology of Jesus? Because they had some religious problem? No, they didn't receive Him because He was journeying with His face toward Jerusalem. They hated the fact that He was going down to worship at that temple which they despised. And they were so jealous. As I said, because theirs had been destroyed in 128 by John Hyrcanus never rebuilt and they had this sort of meager sort of unsophisticated sort of outdoor kind of worship and here was this magnificent Herodian temple in the city of Jerusalem and it was just a bone of contention and a point of jealousy and they weren’t about to accommodate anybody in their enemy camp going down there. Long hate existed and it was exacerbated by the destruction of their own facility. Old feelings ran deep and were lasting. They said no, we're not going to let you have an easy journey down to your place and help you on your way. And so it wasn't really theological, it was more this whole racial thing and this religious jealousy. And verse 54 when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" This is the Saddam Hussein kind of reaction.

Now on the one hand, you might say, "It's understandable. They love the Lord. They've seen His glory on the mountain." I mean, there's a touch of nobility in this righteous indignation. These two are called the sons of thunder, Boanerges. I think it's Mark 3:17. They were volatile guys and they just blew up, they were so angry. Probably tired, probably hungry, probably wanting to rest and they had been rebuked and rebuffed and their Lord has been dishonored and He is the God of the universe in

human flesh and they are just outraged by this. And they say, "Lord," feeling their sort of apostolic oats a little bit, "Do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" Well what made them think they could do that? They had never done that. They healed some people and maybe raised the dead and perhaps cast out some demons, but they hadn't been calling fire down from heaven. What in the world are they thinking? Well, I'll tell you what they were thinking, because some translations say, and you'll see it in the margin even here, "Do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them as Elijah did?" They knew where they were and they were thinking back to 2 Kings, chapter 1. Elijah was in the same area, the same region. And some of the enemies of God got in a situation with Elijah and he called down fire from heaven and burned them up. Do you remember? The pagan king sends fifty guys down there to Elijah and Elijah calls down fire from heaven and incinerates them as an act of divine judgment on willful rejection and unbelief of the true God. It was a time for judgment. And so the king says, "Well that didn't work. I'll send fifty more." So the second string guys go down and the same thing happens to them. Group three waiting in the wings decides negotiation is a better policy so not wanting to be incinerated like everybody else, they go down and they have a little negotiation. But it was Elijah, you can read that in the first chapter of 2 Kings, fascinating story, about the first 15 verses or so. But Elijah is the instrument of God's destructive judgment and they're in that area, that region. And they're sort of Elijah-like, you know, because they've been called to be the prophets of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only that, hey, our good buddy Elijah, you know, we were up with him on the mountain. They were just sort of Elijah-conscious, you know. Yeah, Elijah was in this area and you know what he did, he just burned them all up. Lord, do You want us to do an Elijah on them?

Verse 55: "He turned and rebuked them." He rebuked them. And some manuscripts say, when you go back to the originals some of the old, old manuscripts, some have it and some don't, but certainly what is here is true, whether or not it was said on this occasion, a similar thing was said and we'll see it in Luke 19:10, but anyway, we'll take it as it comes in the text. "He turned and rebuked them and said, 'You don't know what kind of spirit you're of.'" You better get in touch with yourself, guys. You can't go through ministry with that kind of an attitude. I mean, you're going to go in and you're going to make a simple proclamation of Jesus Christ and somebody doesn't accept Him and you want to burn them to death? This is not sensible evangelism. You know, "Repent or die," you know, what in the world? We don't need that. This is the time of mercy. Verse 56: "For the Son of Man didn't come to destroy men's lives but to save them." We know that, don't we? The Son of Man, Luke 19:10, is come to seek and to save the lost. This may not have been in the original text, but some scribe wanting to embellish it added it and that's why it shows up in some of the later manuscripts, but even though it's sort of scribally parenthetic, it's accurate. The Son of Man didn't come to destroy men's lives but to save them. John 3; read that. He didn't come to destroy. He came to save, to seek and to save the lost.

And what's the point here? He gives mercy to the ignorant. They didn't reject Jesus because He claimed to be God and they rejected that claim. They didn't reject Jesus because He claimed to save by grace and they wanted law. They didn't reject Jesus because they didn't like the religious doctrines He taught. They rejected Him because He was Jewish and He was going to the temple, which means they didn't even understand who He was. And there's always mercy extended to those who may be deeply religious but are ignorant of the truth.

Now there comes a time, if you look over to chapter 10 for a minute, there comes a time when mercy runs out. Look at chapter 10 verse 10. The seventy are sent to preach. “Whatever city you enter, if they do not receive you, go into the streets and say, 'Even the dust of the city which clings to your feet we wipe off in protest against you, yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.'" In other words, when you go out into...He send them to preach and to do miracles and to heal and all that, when you've done all that, that hadn't happened in this village, no miracles, no preaching, if you go there and you do the miracles and you do the preaching and you proclaim the gospel, and they reject, shake the dust. Verse 12: "It will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city. Woe to Chorazin. Woe to Bethsaida." Down to verse 15, "And you, Capernaum, you'll be brought down to Hades." Those were all places that had Jesus and they had the apostles and they had the gospel and they had the message and they had the miracles and they had the proof and they had the evidence. And at that point, God says judgment falls, but there is always mercy for those who are ignorant in their unbelief. Great illustration of this: 1 Timothy 1:13, Paul the apostle, “The Lord has considered me faithful, putting me into service even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor and yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief." There's no place for a holy war. We're not having a holy war. There never should be a holy war where we go and say to some infidel people or some other religion whoever they might be, including those in Islam, "Repent or we'll kill you." They act ignorantly in unbelief and we extend to them as the ministers of Jesus Christ a mission of mercy. And we give them the merciful gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus teaches a lesson by simply rebuking them and then at the end of verse 56, "They went on to another village."

Is that the end of them? I don't think so. I don't think so. They just went on and they did whatever they needed to do to find a place somewhere else. Maybe it was a village back into Galilee or over in some other place. A little inconvenient, but a few years after this, the early church began to grow and a man named Philip, it says in Acts 8, went down to Samaria and preached Christ to them. You know what happened? Acts 8:6-8, "The multitudes were of one accord...with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip." Wouldn't that be great? You being an evangelist, you go into a town where they've never heard the gospel, you preach it and everybody believes. It just wasn't their time yet to hear the gospel. Why? Because Christ hadn't yet died and risen. Later the gospel came back. It may well have

been that some of the people that James and John wanted to incinerate got converted. And it says, "They were hearing and seeing the miracles which Philip did. Unclean spirits crying with a loud voice came out of many who were possessed, many who were paralyzed and lame were healed and there was great joy in that city." This is a mission of mercy and we take the message of the mercy of God in Christ to the people outside our borders, outside our comfort zone, outside our religious turf and we give them compassion and sympathy and tenderheartedness and patience to hear and believe the message.

It doesn't mean that we are tolerant of sin. We confront sin with our very message, don't we? And Jesus, though He was merciful and offered the message of mercy, was relentless in His confrontation of sin. But He was at the same time patient with sinners and merciful toward them. We must confront sin. We must call people to repent. We must warn them that their sin has consequences. But it is not for us to determine and execute those consequences. We are on a mission of mercy. Whenever the church in its history has moved from mercy to judgment, it has brought great dishonor on the name of Jesus Christ. If you go back in history and read about things like the Inquisition, the execution of people who were deemed by the Roman Catholic Church to be substandard, disobedient to the authority of the church, or heretical; the Crusades, which were another terrible blight on the name of Jesus Christ, because crusaders marching in the name of Jesus Christ went across Europe slaughtering people. You can go back all the way to the New Testament and we're warned by Jesus that it's not our responsibility to decide who the tares are and rip them out of the ground. It's the responsibility of the Lord when He comes to do the sorting out and He'll determine who gets barned and who gets burned. The church has even engaged through the years in the execution of infidels, determining that truth was so important that if people didn't come along with the truth, they...they actually, the church actually had a divine mandate to execute them. No less a theologian, no less a man of God than John Owen was the chaplain with the forces of Cromwell when the English went to Ireland to kill the Catholics and this again brought dishonor on the name of Christ.

Some of the Anabaptists were actually drowned by Reformers who were pro-infant baptism and they decided that if these people wanted baptism, they'd give them a baptism from which they'd never come up. This brought terrible dishonor on the name of Christ. Through the years the church has jailed sinners, hanged witches, and you can name it. And every time it has been done it has brought dishonor on the name of Christ. We are, as Jesus was, on a mission of mercy. And I only say all that because I...I want to make sure we understand we're not making an easy truce with sin when I say that. We continue to confront sin and call for repentance, but we leave the final determination of judgment to God and as long as we have time, we cease from pronouncing judgment and plead with sinners to receive the mercy that we offer in the gospel. That's the lesson on mercy and how we need to learn it.

Mercy is at the heart of redemptive ministry. Mercy is to extend to all without regard for race, or status, or gender, or age. And mercy is to be offered patiently toward those who are ignorant in unbelief. And by the way, Micah 7:18, "God delights in mercy." And He'll delight in you if you are a merciful Christian.

Father, we ask that You would bless us now as we bring this wonderful worship service to its close. We thank You that our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated Your mercy, mercy toward sinners such as we are. We thank You, we bless Your name for that mercy extended to us without regard to our merit or demerit. We had no merit. We had only demerit. We had nothing to offer You but need and You condescended in love to meet that need without regard for our unworthiness. We who have received mercy must be a merciful people. May it be at the heart of our ministry though we hold the truth with passion, may it always be linked with mercy to those who don't yet know or believe it. And may we extend that mercy as wide as the world to those who are in ignorant unbelief and leave the judgment to You. There will come a time when You come to the Samaria of this world in judgment, but for now it's the time of mercy. Extend that mercy through us, we pray in Your Son's name. Amen.

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