**I Desire Mercy, Not Sacrifice**

Based on [Luke 10:23-37](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk10.23-37)

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“Be merciful, just as your Father in heaven is merciful.” Jesus taught these words to those who would follow him. And they give insight into the meaning of the story he tells of the merciful samaritan. The story has two messages to teach. First, “Be merciful”...the story commands us to show mercy to our neighbor. Second, “Your Father in heaven is merciful’; the story teaches that we are to be merciful, not as some legal ordinance, but because we are to be like God himself who is merciful.

We are to be merciful to our neighbor. Jesus tells a story about three men who come by a man on the road who is beaten and left for dead. Two of them pass by and leave him for dead. One man stops, tends his wounds, carries him to sanctuary and provides for his care. The message is this...be merciful to everyone. It is our sinful inclination to only show mercy to those who are our family or friends; to people we know or people we like. We are inclined to feel no responsibility for strangers. But every person is created after the image and likeness of God, from the baby in the womb to the body in the tomb. Even strangers are our neighbor. Even our enemies are our neighbor. We naturally show mercy to family, that is, those who are familiar to us. Jesus teaches us to show mercy to our neighbor, those who are near to us, strangers and even enemies.

Jesus gives a detailed picture of what that mercy looks like. The samaritan is not simply a first responder. He doesn’t only call for help and stand by. He becomes the help. He personally tends to the injured man, cleans his wounds and binds them up. He carries the man to safety; and provides for his security. This is not to give us a programme for how we are to help others. Many times it is best to simply call for help and trust the professionals. The point is that the samaritan actually cares, he really cares for the well-being of this man that he’s never met. And he helps the man without concern for whether the man is to be trusted. He leaves the man with the innkeeper and gives him a blank cheque. He says, “Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.”

You cannot ignore the humanitarian theme of this parable. There are societies named after it, “The Good Samaritan society”. There are laws named after it, “Good Samaritan laws”. We live in a society that the believes all human beings are of intrinsic worth. That didn’t come about naturally. That happened because the word of God insinuated itself in the middle of human history and taught it to a world that naturally only cares about family and friends. And now that we value all life, Democracy, Welfare, Equality, Life, Liberty, Dignity all these enlightened social values came not from man, but from the humanitarian teaching contained in this parable. But that’s only half of what is being taught.

Jesus says, “be merciful, *as your Father in heaven is merciful*.” Love everyone from the heart, even as God loves everyone from the heart. Desire the salvation of everyone, even as God desires all to be saved. And that last part, is most important. Because the story of the Good Samaritan parallels the Gospel of the Saviour.

The Priest and the Levite, they were natives of Judea and residents of the land where the man was found. He was found in their land and they could not help the man who was beaten on the road and left for dead. We tend to think that they were simply selfish, or lacked compassion...and that might be. But this is a perfect example of why you need to know your whole bible. The priest and the levite, according to the Old Testament, were forbidden to touch the dead. It made them ceremonially unclean, and they were called to make atonement for the sins of the people and constantly work in the temple. Imagine a surgeon operating with unclean hands...it’s no good. He’s got to sterilize them and keep them that way or else he can’t help anyone. So too, the Priest and Levite were limited in what they could do. Should they help the man left for dead on the road, he might die or already be dead and they would be disqualified from temple service for a time of purification.

But the Samaritan, he was a foreigner. He was a stranger in that country. Why he came and why he was there we are not told. But we are told that because he was there, the man was saved. And unlike the priest and the levite who were unable to help; he had the ability. He had the wherewithal. Not only did he not have to remain ceremonially clean; but he also had oil and wine to cleanse and tend the wound. He was able to carry the man to safety; and he had the means to pay for his future care as much as was needed.

The Son of God was a native resident of heaven. But he came down from heaven and was born a man and dwelt among us. He was not from here, and his kingdom is not of this world, but he came here. And though he kept God’s laws, he had an ability that the Priest and Levite of this world lacked. When they touched what was unclean, or plagued by sin and death they became unclean and unable to help their people. But Jesus came with the ability and the willingness to take our uncleanness upon himself.

Jesus touched lepers and made them well; he touched the dead and raised them to life; he touched the blind and the lame and made them well. And I don’t know if you noticed, but when he healed the deaf man last week...he groaned. When a woman who was bleeding for twelve years touched his garment for healing, Jesus percieved that power left him. “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He himself bore our sins in his body. By his wounds we have been healed.”

And he came cleaning our wounds with the baptismal washing of regeneration. He cleansed us with the wine of his blood. We were dead in our trespasses and sins and he showed us mercy, carried us to the sanctuary of the church, giving her ministers with the collateral to forgive sins without measure until he returns.

The story of the good samaritan is about what the kingdom of God is like. It is about what God is like. God says, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” Not all the priests and levites in this world, not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain could save us poor miserable sinners from the death we deserve. But the ransom had to be paid, and God made a way to get what he desires...he is merciful, therefore go and be likewise. Forgive as you are forgiven in Christ; love as you have been loved by God; be merciful to others, as your father in heaven is merciful to you.