

# The Mercy of Mission

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, who is my neighbour? How would you answer that question? I guess I could answer it! by saying, well, we're at number nine and Leslie is that number no, we're number seven, Leslie, Leslie's number eight, Rohail and his family are number nine, Paul and Mandy along the road are number six, David and Ashton further along the road and around the corner, don't know their number just to know where their house is. Gavin and Janet, they're even further along the road and around the corner and there's a bunch of people in between. They're all my neighbours, but I don't think that's what Jesus means. It's not those who are geographically close to us who are really our neighbours because the Bible commands us repeatedly throughout to love your neighbour. So what does it mean to love your neighbour? What does it mean for you to love your neighbour, for me to love my neighbour when I figure out which house they live in, for CCG to love our neighbour?

What does it mean to love your neighbour? What does it mean to love your neighbour? Because the vision for Christ Church Glasgow is loving God, loving each other, sorry, loving God, loving each other and loving Glasgow. And so that final part of our vision, loving Glasgow, that really means loving your neighbour, loving our neighbours.

And of course, we best love our neighbours by telling them the good news about Jesus Christ. That's what we've seen in this study of the mission of the church. The mission of the church is to tell people about Jesus and introduce them to him. So that's how we best love our neighbours. People have this spiritual need to know Jesus as saviour. But people also have other needs, physical, material and social needs. And so loving our neighbour will also involve meeting these needs too.

And so what does this look like? And so what does this look like? Well, this Bible passage that was read for us, the parable of the Good Samaritan, is the best passage that shows us how to love your neighbour.

[ 2 : 17 ] And it is one of the most famous short stories ever. And it is one of the most famous short stories ever. Because it gives this radical example of how to love our neighbour, whoever, whoever they are.

So we're to care about the whole person, materially, physically, socially, as well as spiritually. And we're to give our time and our energy and our resources to help them, even if it is costly or risky for us.

Because what Jesus is showing us here is the kind of mercy that is required of every Christian and every church. And so let's look at this parable under these three headings. First, the directive of mercy. Second, the dimensions of mercy. And then third, the dynamic of mercy.

Directive, dimensions and dynamic. First of all, the directive of mercy. This story starts with a law expert trying to test Jesus. And so verse 25, on one occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.

Now, when it says he was an expert in the law, it's meaning the law of God. So this is a religious scholar. And he wants to trap Jesus. He wants to trip Jesus up.

[ 3 : 34 ] And so his question, there in verse 25, teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Notice how he frames his question. What must I do to inherit eternal life?

And there's a contradiction in his words because nobody inherits anything by doing something, do they? If you inherit something, you receive it, whether it's money or property or a title.

It comes to you as an heir through the death of the previous holder. And so it sounds like this man, like many still, like many always, thinks that eternal life can be obtained through the things that you do.

That you get it by doing good works or you get it by living a certain kind of life. But notice that Jesus doesn't get drawn into this man's trap.

Jesus knows what is going on in his heart. And so he takes the conversation in the direction that he wants it to go instead of the direction the man wants it to go in. And Jesus answers the man's question with his own question.

[ 4 : 47 ] I wonder if you noticed that it's a technique that Jesus often uses. He answers people's questions with a question to them. And so it's a useful one for us to use in our evangelism.

And so verse 26 says, what is written in the law? He replied, how do you read it? And then the law expert gives his summary there in verse 27.

He answered, love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself. And Jesus tells him, you're right.

Yes. Verse 28. Do this and you will live. In other words, obey those two commands fully and then you'll have eternal life.

And it's a smart and clever move by Jesus. He's saying, this is the directive. This is what God requires of you.

[ 5 : 49 ] This is what you must do. And so Jesus is forcing him to reflect on the kind of life God wants him to live. And Jesus wants to show him the high standard that the law requires to do these two things, obey these two commands.

This high standard is actually impossible to meet. There's no way he'd manage to do it. So see what Jesus is doing.

He is smashing this man's self-confidence in his ability to get eternal life through his own effort. And the man is rattled by Jesus' response.

But he doesn't give up because the text tells us, verse 29, he wanted to justify himself. So he's still confident in his own ability to get eternal life by himself.

And that's why he asks Jesus, and who is my neighbor? He wants Jesus to define loving your neighbor.

[ 6 : 56 ] In other words, he knows he's got to love his neighbor. But who exactly is his neighbor? And what kind of love must he show to that neighbor?

He wants to make it manageable. He wants to make it doable. He wants to make it possible. He wants to know just how much he's got to do, just how far he's got to go, so that he can sit down and be satisfied that he has done it.

He has done the needful. He has carried out the duty of loving his neighbor. And so this expert in the law is trying to defend himself here.

It's like he's saying to Jesus, Jesus, surely you're not suggesting we have got to love everyone and do everything for them.

That's crazy. That is ridiculous. That's impossible. So Jesus, can't you just whittle it down? Can't you just make it just enough so that we can know when we have actually done our duty in loving our neighbor?

[ 8 : 07 ] And that's when Jesus hits him with this great story, the parable of the Good Samaritan. And it's like Jesus is saying to the man, okay, if you really want to know who your neighbor is and you really want to know how you should love your neighbor, the extent of your love for them, then I'll tell you.

And so he tells him the story. And then after Jesus tells the story, he asks the law expert, verse 36, which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? And so the law expert is then forced to respond, verse 37, the one who had mercy on him. And then Jesus told him, go and do likewise.

And so when we use that phrase mercy ministry, it comes from the parable of the Good Samaritan because the Good Samaritan had mercy on the poor victim who was beaten up and was lying half dead on the road.

And so Jesus not only commands the expert in the law, but every single one of us to be like the Good Samaritan because the Good Samaritan exemplifies for us in a pictorial way just exactly what it means to love your neighbor.

[ 9 : 30 ] So if that's our question, then we look at this man and we see, okay, that's how you love your neighbor. And Jesus wants us to go and do likewise.

So that's the first point, the directive of mercy. The second is the dimensions of mercy. What are the dimensions of mercy that we are to show? What's the scope? What is the extent of our mercy? How far do we need to go to know that we have shown mercy, to know that we have been compassionate? Well, the story makes that clear, doesn't it?

Verse 30, In reply, Jesus said, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

And so we're introduced to a man, and he's on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. And it's obviously a very dangerous road. There were robbers there and they attack the man and they leave him half dead.

[10:32] But then some religious men come down the road after him. Great news, we think. Not really. Verse 31 tells us, A priest happened to be going down the same road and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. So a priest comes along, a Levite comes along, but they each pass by on the other side.

Now, surely they should have stopped and helped the man, but they don't get involved. And I guess they probably rationalized it to themselves in their minds as to why exactly they should not get involved.

It would have been risky to stop. I mean, if the robbers robbed one man, beat him up, then surely they're lying in wait just waiting for the next unsuspecting character to come walking down the road.

And so they probably thought, well, we put ourselves in danger if we stop to help. So, maybe not. Maybe they even used religious reasons for avoiding this man on the road.

[11:50] I mean, they don't want to get dirty if they're going to the temple and so on and so on. And yet the sad irony is that priests and Levites were the very people who were responsible for helping those in need.

Because amongst their other duties, priests were basically like the public health officials. And Levites were the people who distributed money and goods to the poor.

So of all the people to come walking past the road, these two were the best people to help the man who was lying half dead.

And yet sadly, they failed to put their religion into practice. They failed to practice what they probably preached in the temple.

So when it really mattered, they failed. They were disappointing. They were actually embarrassing. Because a man on their path needed help.

[12:52] They had a responsibility to help. They had the power to help. But they do nothing. They pass by, leaving him for dead.

And that's when Jesus introduces the good Samaritan to the law expert and to his listeners. Verse 33. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was.

And when he saw him, he took pity on him. Now, there's a dimension to the story which would have been obvious to the original listeners that we shouldn't miss.

Because these days, when we hear this phrase, good Samaritan, Samaritans are good people. The charity, Samaritans, gets its name from this parable because it's full of people who are on the other end of a phone call to help and support those in need.

But that kind, helpful, compassionate person didn't come to mind when a Jew heard the word Samaritan, like in Jesus' parable here. Because Samaritans were bitter enemies of the Jews.

[14:04] And so no Jew would be expecting a Samaritan to behave like the Samaritan in Jesus' parable. So Jesus could not have picked a more unlikely hero for his story.

Because while the Samaritan faced the same dangers as the priest and the Levite, Jesus said the Samaritan took pity on him. Took pity on him.

The word is actually compassion. compassion. And it's a compassion that he had that led to action. Verse 34, He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.

Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The Samaritan risked his life. He got involved.

He interrupted his schedule so he could serve this man. He gave his time. He gave his money. He was ready to get bloody, ready to get dirty, even though the victim was a man of a different race, an

enemy.

[ 15 : 14 ] And yet he's willing to go to great expense in order to help him. What does he do? Well, he provides transport, a donkey. He takes him to a place of shelter, the inn.

He pays for the man's future care, whatever the cost. That's like writing a blank check, isn't it? Not knowing how much it would take in order for this man to be rehabilitated.

And he even promises a follow-up visit. He basically underwrites his whole recovery from start to finish. The Samaritan sacrificed his safety, his time, and his money.

And all for a man who was a complete stranger. And so the question that the law expert asked, who is my neighbor, gets a comprehensive answer from Jesus, doesn't it?

And so for us, well, we can't limit our definition of neighbor. Whether to the small group of people who live near us on our street or to the people who are just like us or to the people that we like.

[ 16 : 30 ] Because those are the kinds of people who it is much easier to help. But Jesus won't allow us to define neighbor in that way.

Because through the story of the Samaritan, Jesus is telling us that our neighbor is anyone, anyone in need. absolutely anyone regardless of race, religion, class, politics, or anything else.

And if that's the case, then how is the command to love your neighbor to be obeyed? Well, just like we shouldn't put limits on the person, neither should we put limits on the love that we are to show.

And so despite the priest and the Levite having the biblical knowledge and the ethical principles, they lacked the compassion and love that was needed.

Because they never lifted a single finger to help the poor man. And then along comes the Samaritan and there was no limit to what he was prepared to do despite the risk and despite the cost.

[ 17 : 42 ] he was the real neighbor. He was the true neighbor to the victim on the road. And so the law expert wanted to put limits on loving your neighbor.

But Jesus says, there are no limits. There are no boundaries to the dimensions of the mercy that you are to show to people in need.

You may have heard of Jonathan Edwards. He was an American theologian and a minister in the 18th century. Minister of a church in Northampton, Massachusetts. And in 1733, Edwards preached a sermon and it had this title, The Duty of Charity to the Poor.

It's a long sermon. Longer than my sermons. You can read it online. It'll take quite a while. And Edwards preached that sermon called The Duty of Charity to the Poor because he knew that in his context, people just weren't helping the poor and needy.

And so in his sermon, he answers 11 specific objections that people have about helping the poor. So basically, what he does is 11 times he takes the objection, he lays it out, explicitly makes it clear, and then he answers it.

[ 19 : 05 ] And he basically says that they're all excuses. All of these objections are basically excuses that put limits on the command that Jesus gave to love your neighbor.

And Edwards closes his sermon with these words. He says, Now, it is too obvious to be denied that there are, in fact, those that are in want so that it would be a charitable act in us to help them.

And then he goes on and his final sentence is, A man must hide his eyes to think otherwise. In other words, you've got to close your eyes and be blind to the needs of those around you.

And if you do, then you're disobeying the command that Jesus gives. And so I guess, for us, as we apply this to ourselves, it's probably really easy for us to hide our eyes to the needs of those around us.

It's much easier that way to turn a blind eye because there's no risk, there's no cost, there's no uncomfortableness There's no uncomfortableness about what we're doing.

[ 20 : 30 ] It's never enough to know we ought to show mercy in our heads because we all know we ought to show mercy.

We're all aware of that. And yet the parable is forcing us to open our eyes, to be moved with compassion in our hearts that will lead to action with our hands.

Because when you think about it, everyone is on our road, whether we walk past them or not. And so we can either avoid people on our road or we can help people.

And Jesus makes it clear here that we're to love anyone in need, anyone who comes across our path like this poor victim did for the Samaritan.

So we're to help people even if it means meeting their needs with our resources. Because we can't simply just love in theory.

[ 21 : 37 ] Everybody loves in theory. Love is a great virtue. Nobody disagrees with love. And we can't just simply love in word. Although it's good to love in word and express our love with words, but the parable is forcing us to love in deed.

Otherwise, we miss the point of Jesus' power. We miss its punch if we think it's not for us and what we do. And so Jesus is saying here to us, as he says to the law expert, don't dare to limit the mercy that you ought to show.

And so how can we do this? Well, let's move to our third point. There's the directive of mercy, there are the dimensions of mercy, and then thirdly, the dynamic of mercy. What is the dynamic of mercy?

Where do you get the power to live like this? Well, look at verse 36 and 37 again. Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?

The expert in the law replied, the one who had mercy on him. Jesus told him, go and do likewise. So how can we go and do likewise?

[ 22 : 52 ] Well, there is a sting in the tale of this story because Jesus is forcing the law expert to confess that the Samaritan is the hero of the story.

But you notice that in the law expert's response, he can't even say the word Samaritan. I guess it must have stuck in his throat. So much so that Jews hate Samaritans.

So Jesus not only reverses the expected role of the characters in his story whereby the religious Jews, the priest and the Levite pass by on the other side.

They fail to be neighbors to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers. And the Samaritan is the one who shows what being a neighbor means by having mercy on him.

But that is not the only shock in Jesus' story because yes, the Samaritan is the hero of the story. Remember the question?

[ 23 : 55 ] Who is my neighbor? Verse 29. So Jesus is even suggesting that the law expert is the victim in the story. Because after the story, Jesus asks him who was the neighbor implying that if the Samaritan was the neighbor, then he, the law expert, was the man on the road in desperate need of help.

He was the one needing mercy to be shown to him. And so Jesus helps him see that despite Jews and Samaritans being bitter enemies, if the law expert was the victim, then of course he would want a good Samaritan to come along the road and help him.

If he was attacked, if he was beaten up, if he was left for dead, then no doubt would he be glad that somebody showed him compassion no matter who they were, irrespective of any barriers between them.

He'd want a neighbor to love him and to have mercy on him. Which means the answer to the question, who is my neighbor, is anyone in need?

Absolutely anyone. See, Jesus here is exposing the law expert's heart because if he's, if he grasps spiritually that he is like the poor victim on the road in desperate need of help, then only then will he realize what he needs to do and who he needs to love.

[ 25 : 37 ] So his question, remember at the start, what must I do to inherit eternal life? He was under the delusion that he could get eternal life by what he did.

And so if Jesus could just define it, then he could manage it. But Jesus forces him to see you can't do that. And so by telling the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus does this kind of demolition job and the law expert's self-justifying heart.

And so for us, it's only as we realize that we can't do anything to get eternal life, but we only receive eternal life by grace, only as we grasp that, will we then want to show that grace to other people no matter who they are.

Only when we've experienced God's compassion and mercy towards us, will we show it to others. And that's the dynamic of mercy.

It's as we grasp that we are the poor man lying on the road in desperate need of help that we get Jesus' parable. Because Ephesians chapter 2 tells us we're all spiritually dead.

[ 26 : 56 ] And we can't do anything about it. And yet God shows us mercy in Jesus Christ. Through the gospel of grace, God has come to us.

He came down onto our road by entering into our world. And despite being his enemies because of our sin, he approaches us with compassion.

And he paid the debt of our sin, a debt that we can never afford on the cross. And it's by his wounds that we are healed.

And so Jesus raises us up from our spiritual death and restores our lives at great expense to himself. And Jesus didn't just risk his life like the Samaritan did.

Jesus gave his life for us. Now, Jesus doesn't depict himself as the good Samaritan in his story. But it's impossible not to see Jesus in its message.

[ 28 : 04 ] Jesus is the true and better Samaritan that the good Samaritan points towards. And it's only when we realize that we've been saved by the radical neighbor love of Jesus that we will want to show it to others.

There's no other dynamic, there's no other power that can propel us towards the kind of mercy and compassion that we see here in the parable of the good Samaritan other than that we have received that deep in our hearts ourselves.

Because when we know that Jesus has reached out to us in our need and we didn't deserve it, only then will we be ready to reach out to others in their others.

And so what does this look like for you, for me, for us together at Christ Church Glasgow to love our neighbor? Well, practically, I think we must have four things, four things.

Our eyes open, our hearts moved, our hands working, and our money given. So first of all, our eyes open. We've got to have our eyes open to the needs of those around us.

[ 29 : 19 ] As we go about our daily work and daily life, we've got to see the world as it really is. And so can we see the needs of the people in our neighborhood or down our street or perhaps hidden behind the surface in our workplaces?

There's homelessness, there's hunger, there's poverty, there's unemployment, there's drug addiction, as well as all of those other less obvious needs in people's lives.

So eyes open, second hearts moved. We'll need to have our hearts moved towards people. Does the gospel of Jesus Christ compel you, compel me, to love our neighbors in need?

How much do we really care for our city? How much do we really care about the people who live in northwest Glasgow? Thirdly, we'll need to have our hands working, hands working to meet the needs of those around us.

Will we take action by actually doing something, not just theoretically in our heads, but practically with our lives? Is there a Christian charity that we can support and serve that helps the vulnerable or the needy in our community?

[ 30 : 41 ] Or is it a ministry that does mercy and justice and provides opportunities for us to love our neighbors? Maybe a food bank or a counseling service or some kind of educational course, or maybe using our building as a warm space for people to come, or maybe providing some of the basics that help people in life, or maybe the need is just so great that we need to start our own kind of mercy ministry to support the people here.

So eyes open, hearts moved, hands working, and money given. We need to be ready to give our money, don't we, like the Samaritan in the parable? It is going to cost if we are really, truly going to serve and actually help people.

It is going to take giving our resources as individuals, or as families, or perhaps as a community group, or as a church. We've got to have our eyes open, our hearts moved, our hands working, and our money given.

Because if we're going to take what Jesus says here seriously, and love our neighbour like he commands us, not just in word, but also in deed, then we'll need to have mercy like the good Samaritan to go and do likewise.

Let's pray.