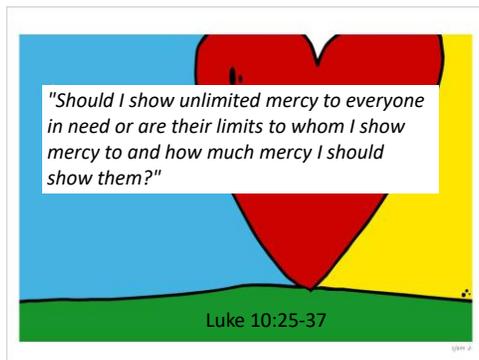


Jericho Road: *Limitless or Limited Mercy?*

Luke 10:25-37

By pastor Ken Keyte
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Over the past few weeks we've been taking a look at what the *parable of the Good Samaritan* teaches us about *showing mercy to people in need*.

Jesus told it to *answer the question* a religious law expert asked him about *what he must do to inherit eternal life*. Jesus answered him, "*Do what's written in the law*" "You mean *love God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind and love your neighbour as yourself?*" "Correct", said Jesus, "*Do this and you will live.*" Hoping to justify himself as someone who kept these laws and so worthy of eternal life, the law expert then asked Jesus to *define who his neighbour was*.

Another way of putting his question is:
"*Should I show unlimited mercy to everyone in need or are their limits to whom I show mercy to and to how much mercy I should show them?*"

1a

Even today within Christianity, there are *two schools of thought* about that question. There are those who say there should be *no limits* to *who* we show mercy to and *no limit* to *how much* mercy we show them.

This answer tends to come from the *more liberal corner* of Christianity.

But there are *others* who say that *there are limits* to *who* we show mercy to and *how much* mercy we show them. This answer tends to come from the *more conservative corner* of Christianity.

Yet *despite* there being a *difference of opinion* on this, it nevertheless is an *important question* to answer because however we answer it will determine *who* or *who not*, and *how much* or *how little* mercy we show to people in need.

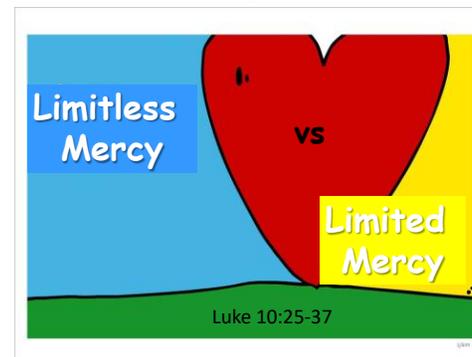
Given that *two of our church emphases* for the year could be aligned with *either position*, this question is *very relevant* to how *our church decides to show mercy to people in need*.

Our *fourth church emphasis* for the year is: "*Unconditional, inclusive love for others*"- which sounds a lot like the *limitless mercy view*.

Whereas our *fifth emphasis* is: "*Self Discipline- what's ours to do what's not?*" Which sounds a lot like the *limited mercy view*.

So we're going to examine *both views*.

2



The case for *limitless mercy* versus *limited mercy*, to see *which one* is the most convincing.

We're going to examine the *incident of the highway robbery on Jericho Road* (otherwise known as the parable of the Good Samaritan),
to help us *solve the case for limitless mercy versus limited mercy.*

So let's *imagine for a moment* (if you can) that I am *the judge* assigned to *cross examining* the individuals involved in this highway robbery,
to determine whether *Jesus* was teaching *limitless mercy* or *limited mercy through this parable.*

Here goes:

"Victim of the highway robbery on Jericho Road,
will you please take the stand."

Victim, have you ever met the Samaritan before he came to your aid on Jericho Road?

Victim: "I have never met the Samaritan before he came to my assistance on Jericho Road"

"Victim of the highway robbery on Jericho Road,
since you are *a Jew* and the man who helped you is a *Samaritan,*
are you or are you not *an enemy of the Samaritan?*

Victim: "I am an enemy of the Samaritan (at least I was before he helped me)."

"Victim of the highway robbery, can you explain then,
why the Samaritan would come to your aid?"

Victim: "No I cannot"

"I have no further questions for the victim."

"Samaritan, will you please take the stand.
Samaritan, since the victim is a Jew, and you are a Samaritan,
am I correct in saying that *you helped an enemy in need?*

Samaritan: "Yes, sir."

"Samaritan, does that mean that your mercy is not limited to only your friends but also extends to your enemy?"

Samaritan: "Yes, sir."

"Samaritan, given that Jericho Road is notoriously dangerous for highway robberies, and you stopped for over an hour to administer first aid to the victim,
does that mean *that your mercy is not limited by your personal health and safety but extends to putting yourself in danger?*

Samaritan: "I suppose so sir."

"Samaritan, it has been reported that you also paid two pieces of silver to cover the cost of the victim's food and lodging at the inn you took him to, where he recovered from his injuries, and that you returned later to settle the outstanding bill."

Samaritan: "That's correct, sir"

"Samaritan, your actions lead me to believe that your mercy is not limited by what it might cost you financially?"

Samaritan: "I suppose so sir."

"And finally Samaritan: it has also been reported that you were a day late for your business appointment in Jericho because of helping the victim.
Which could have lost you your business deal and damaged your reputation as a businessman.
So your actions lead me to believe that your mercy *is not limited by your personal agenda or reputation?"*

Samaritan: "Well I haven't thought of it like that before, but I guess not sir."

"Samaritan, based on the evidence I have heard in this case of limitless mercy versus limited mercy,
I see *sufficient evidence* to rule that the mercy you have shown to this victim is for all intent and purpose: *limitless!*

But *before I make that ruling*, is there *anything* that you *did* or *did not do* for this victim that would suggest *otherwise*?"

Samaritan: "Well actually *there is your honour!*"

"Then Samaritan, what *did you do* or *did not do*, that suggests *there are limits* to the mercy you would show to the victim?"

Samaritan: "Well *first of all*, although I gave the Inn Keeper *two pieces of silver to cover the victims expenses and promised to return to pay any further expenses*, I only committed to do this *until the victim was well enough to return home and begin working again*. I would *not* have paid for any expenses *beyond that point*."

"I see, so your mercy was *limited* to the point when the victim was able to *take care of himself and begin working again*?"

Samaritan: "Yes *your honour*, as it says in Ecclesiastes 3:22, *...there is nothing better than that all should enjoy their work,...*"

"Anything else?"

"Yes *sir*, although I promised to return to *pay the outstanding accommodation bill*, and to *check he was well enough to return home*, I also wanted to see *how the victim was doing relationally, psychologically and spiritually*. I was returning to ask him whether he was *ready to forgive his attackers*. And to find out *whether he was afraid of travelling on the road again*. I also wanted to ask him *whether he knew that God's mercy is far greater than the mercy I had shown him*. And I wanted to *pray for him*, that God would *protect his journey home*, and *reunite him with his family*, and *restore what had been stolen from him*, and that God would *heal both the physical and psychological wounds he has suffered*."

"So are you saying, that your mercy *did have some conditions attached to it after all*?"

That you would expect the victim to *spend some time with you discussing his physical, relational, psychological and spiritual health*?"

Samaritan: "*That's correct, your honour.*"

And what if he *didn't want to do that*?
Would you have required him to *pay his expenses back to you*?"

Samaritan: "*No of course not!* If he was *only willing to be helped* till he was *physically well enough to return home*, then our relationship would have *ended there* without any obligation.

But if he *was willing to continue our relationship*, I'd be willing to continue meeting him on a regular basis to see *how he was doing relationally, psychologically and spiritually*, for as long as he wanted to *keep meeting with me*."

"And why would you want to go as far as that?"

Samaritan: "Well *sir*, since *God made us in his image*, our mercy is meant to *imitate God's mercy*. Although God's mercy *comes without limits*, it does not proceed *without limits*. God *requires our co-operation* to become *like the image we see of him in Jesus*. *No-one* can be *truly happy* until we become *truly holy*, which requires *our co-operation with God*. If the victim is *willing to let me help him with that*, then *I'm willing to keep helping him*, so that he can see an *imitation of the limitlessness of God's mercy in me*, as well as seeing a reflection of the *limitations of God's mercy through me*."

"I see, let me ponder upon that for a moment....
are you saying that *there are two sides to God's mercy*?
That God *first offers his mercy to everyone in a limitless way*, but that after *accepting God's mercy*, his *ongoing mercy* is conditional upon *co-operating with him*?"

Samaritan: "Yes I am."

"And that as we begin *co-operating with God*, he begins *transforming us* into a *more Jesus-like version of ourselves?*"

Samaritan: "You've got it!"

"And are you *also saying that since we were made in God's image*, the *mercy we offer to anyone in need*, should *mimic the two sided mercy of God?*"

3



Samaritan: "That's right."

"And we do that by first *offering mercy in a limitless way to anyone in need*, but once our mercy *has been accepted*, our *ongoing mercy is conditional upon their co-operation*. Whereby *they're transformed by the mercy of God in their lives and ours?*"

Samaritan: "You've nailed it!"

"*In the case of limitless mercy versus limited mercy I hereby rule that the Good Samaritan exhibited two sided mercy that imitates the limitless mercy and limited mercy of God! Case closed!*" (hammer)

As I was thinking about this *two sided mercy of God* that was *displayed by the Good Samaritan*,

I wondered whether *I'd ever practiced this form of mercy* or seen it *practiced by anyone*.

The first incident I thought of was when a *rough looking guy turned up at the church office* last year saying he was *on his way to Wellington* but *didn't have any money for the bus fare*. He told us he was going to see a *magistrate in Wellington* about how *he'd been sexually abused by his foster parents when he was a child*.

He *showed me some papers* describing what had happened to him, which was *horrible to read*.

Angela *checked the bus timetable* on the internet and found out that the *next bus to Wellington left Te Puke at 8:30 the next morning*, which meant he'd have to *spend the night in Te Puke*.

I told him *we'd pay for the bus ticket* and I'd *sort a place for him to stay the night at the Vincent House hostel*. Since he didn't have any bedding *I took him to the Methodist Op shop to buy him some*. Then to *New World* where he *bought some food with the supermarket voucher* we'd given him. After that I ran him up to the *Vincent house hostel*, got him *settled in there* and told him *I'd be back at 8am to give him a ride down to the bus stop*. He thanked me for my troubles and said he'd see me in the morning.

Feeling *like the Good Samaritan*, I turned up at *Vincent House the next morning* to pick him up for the bus, but *he wasn't there!* I checked all over, but *no-one had seen him since the night before*, so I drove towards the bus stop in case he'd started walking, but I couldn't see him anywhere. So I said a silent prayer for him, "*God, I've done all I can, I pray he makes it to the bus on time. And I pray his meeting with the magistrate goes well for him.*"

Several months later I was in a *Te Puke Ministers meeting* at *St Patrick's hall* when we were interrupted by a loud knock on the door. It was the *same guy!* Except this time he was *trying his luck with St Patrick's church!*

He *didn't recognise me*, but while he was out of the room I *told everyone about how he'd come to our church for help a few months earlier.*

So *which form of mercy* should be offered to him this *second time round? Limitless mercy or limited mercy?*

Although we need to be careful *not to misjudge anyone*, it seemed *highly likely to me that this guy was abusing the goodwill of church's like ours and St Patrick's* to support his *transient lifestyle.*

Paul *warns against helping people like that*, in 2nd Thessalonians 3:10:

¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: *"If a person will not work, they shall not eat."*¹¹ We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. ¹² Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.

In writing this, Paul was warning that *our mercy must not make it easier for anyone to disobey God* by not working for a living.

Here's *another example of double sided mercy* that is both *limitless and limited.*

In 1996, *John Kirkby* founded the charitable organisation *Christians Against Poverty*. He did so as a response to *how God's mercy working through Christians, had helped him out of his own poverty caused by extreme debt.* John Kirkby *sensed God calling him to help others who've been entrapped by extreme debt.*

Since then the *ministry of CAP* has spread across the UK, to *Australia, Canada and New Zealand.*

And as you know *our church began a CAP Debt Help Centre*, two years ago, led by *Vicki Scoggins.*

I think, *the way CAP operates is a great example of God's doubled sided limitless and limited mercy* in action that works *like this:*

The *debt help services of CAP* are *freely available to anyone who needs help with debt.* No matter what their situation or background, *when someone calls the CAP helpline*, CAP is ready to offer their services to help them out of debt. In that regard CAP's mercy is *limitless.*

Since it is a *Christian service*, the CAP Centre manager *unashamedly offers to pray for their client and invite them along to whatever the church has going that might be of help to the client and their family.*

Mainly Music, Youth Group, Coffee & Craft, TAG women's event, Men's wild food & rugby night.

These are offered in the hope that *the client will be introduced to Jesus through the church.*

However the client *doesn't have to go to any of this to receive the debt help services of CAP.*

CAP's services are *limitless in that sense too.*

However it *doesn't stay limitless.*

There are conditions that the CAP client must commit to, in order to continue receiving help from CAP.

The client must commit to: *providing all their financial records to CAP* so manageable repayment terms can be negotiated with their creditors and so a living budget can be prepared.

They must commit to *sticking to the CAP budget*, and they must commit to *paying into their CAP account so their debts can be repaid.*

Repeated failure to co-operate with CAP in any of these,

will eventually result in CAP withdrawing their services from the client, even if they are still in serious debt!

I think, the way *Christians Against Poverty* works is a good example of how God's *two sided limitless mercy and limited mercy* can be put into practice *through the church!*

Therefore, *in the case for limitless mercy versus limited mercy I hereby rule that the kind of mercy exhibited by the Good Samaritan was two sided mercy representing the limitless **and** limited mercy of God!*

May we as God's people become good imitators of *this kind of mercy* that is *God's mercy to all people in need!*