

Talks – Mercy – myfishbites.com

Mercy

What does mercy mean? It means undeserved kindness. So that's kindness that you don't deserve and haven't done anything to get.

It would be like you've just been to a shop and stolen some cans of coke. But the shopkeeper catches you. Justice would be that the police are called and you get in trouble. This is what you'd deserve. Mercy could be that the shopkeeper doesn't call the police this time but tells you not to do it again (next time he will phone the police) and even gives you a free can of coke!

Mercy is often related to justice, so in a way this is also a short talk about the results of justice and maybe even about setting the captives free.

Bible – 1 Samuel 30.11-18

They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David. They gave him water to drink and food to eat – part of a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of raisins. He ate and was revived, for he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and three nights. David asked him, 'Who do you belong to? Where do you come from?'

He said, 'I am an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite. My master abandoned me when I became ill three days ago. We raided the Negev of the Kerethites, some territory belonging to Judah and the Negev of Caleb. And we burned Ziklag.'

David asked him, 'Can you lead me down to this raiding party?' He answered, 'Swear to me before God that you will not kill me or hand me over to my master, and I will take you down to them.'

He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and revelling because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah. David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled. David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives.

The Talk

When I read this bit of the Bible and thought about the Egyptian, I was surprised at how David's men reacted to him. Let me explain: David's men were some of the roughest and toughest men you could find. They were experienced killers and they were the very best fighters there were. These were the SAS, the Special Forces of their day.

Yet when they came across an Egyptian in a field, probably looking pretty rough and near death, they showed him mercy. They could have left him, trampled on him or even killed him but instead they cared for him. They gave him precious resources – water and food. He hadn't eaten or drunk anything for 3 days having got ill and been left in a field by his master.

I wondered what kind of life he'd had. I wondered what his master was like. He didn't sound like a good person in any way. Instead it sounded like he didn't have a heart or didn't care for those who he thought weren't worth bothering with like slaves.

I did some work with a local youth organisation in a cafe and met a guy who didn't look very well but had clearly had a tough time in life. He looked very pale like he was ill; he was vulnerable like people may take advantage of him; and he probably hadn't washed for a few days either! But did it matter? No. I saw a young person who God loves and we just chatted and hung out in the cafe like we were mates. I've worked with young people with criminal records or those who've done things that are really strange, mad or disturbing. But myself and the other Christians treated them all with God's love with firm compassion and kindness!

This is what God did for us – we don't deserve his love or kindness (see Ephesians 2.1-10). But God freely offers us this gift of love and life anyway. When God lives in our hearts, we change to become more like him and so his love will come out of us towards other people. Yes we mess up and often don't feel like it but God's love and mercy is in us! (See Galatians 5.22-23).

David's men looked after this ill and vulnerable guy and it's an amazing example for us. They had just had their city destroyed and their wives, all their stuff stolen from them by an evil bunch of people called the Amalekites. They were on their way to fight and get back what had been stolen but they stopped to help this guy. Yes, they may well have wondered if he could help them but the fact is they watered and fed him before they found out who he was.

Here is the amazing thing... David and his men won back their wives, cattle, all their possessions from the Amalekites in battle. But how did they do this? With the help of this Egyptian man who they had helped. Because they stopped to help this man, he helped them. We'll come back to that point in a moment...

When David questioned him for his identity, the Egyptian told him and confessed what had been done. This showed he was an honest man – and here's another lesson... it always pays to be honest, even if you think you've lost out. Always do the honest, the right thing. God watches and sees and he will reward you for what you do. Every time.

So the Egyptian helped David and his men locate the enemies who had robbed them. David promised not to kill him or hand him back to his master and in return, the Egyptian man took David and his multi-racial band of men down to where the enemy were. The enemy were celebrating and were caught unaware – David and his men gave them a good whooping and captured back everything they had lost and more.

David had 200 men who hadn't been able to make it to the battle as they were so exhausted but he also made sure they got their fair share. It's also interesting that when David took the extra things that the Amalekites had, he didn't keep them to himself. Instead the Bible tells us that when they got back to Ziklag (their city), David sent some of the spoils of war (the profits) to his friends. He didn't keep everything for himself but shared it with his friends. This may well have been a kind of strategic thing (to help him in future battles etc) but it also shows mercy and justice.

Conclusion

Let's think about the two different attitudes we can have towards people. We can be merciful or we can be judgmental. We can help people or reject them. We can care for people or we can leave them. We can be like David or like the Egyptian man's evil Amalekite master.

Because David and his men helped the Egyptian man, they were able to recover what they had lost and get some profit. The Egyptian man was also set free from slavery. Let's compare this to the Amalekite master of the Egyptian... Because he left the Egyptian man in a field to die (just because he was ill), the Amalekite lost his slave; lost what he had taken and was no doubt also killed.

The lesson is really clear. When we show God's love, show mercy and seek justice and do the right thing, God is pleased and this always helps that person, ourselves and those around us. But if we don't care, deliberately reject people, judge them or ignore them (like the homeless person in the street, the young person at school who no-one else likes) then we are the ones who lose out and that person may also lose out.

James 2.13 ends by saying this, "Mercy triumphs over judgment."

So James is saying being kind is so much better than judging people.

Today we have to ask God to help us to be like him and show his love, his compassion, his goodness, his kindness – his mercy – towards other people around us. Just like Jesus did and still does to and then through people like you and me.