

Redeemer Presbyterian Church
“Ministries of Mercy- The Call of the Jericho Road”
(A study of the book by Timothy J. Keller, P&R Publishing, 1997.)

Session II.
THE CALL TO MERCY

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” 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.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:25-29)

“Mercy to the full range of human needs is such an essential mark of being a Christian that it can be used as a test of true faith. Mercy is not optional or an addition to being a Christian. Rather, a life poured out in deeds of mercy is the inevitable sign of true faith.” (Keller, p. 35)

I. THE ESSENCE OF LOVE

The **expert in the law** was not really interested in Jesus’ perspective on the question that he asked. He is attempting to set a trap for Christ, trying to get Christ to say something heretical about the law.

Jesus responds by setting a trap for the expert in the law instead- but His is a trap of love. **Summary of the Law** (articulating what was believed by Jewish scribes and teachers):

- *The law hangs on two principles*
 - *The Law requires a heart and mind totally submitted to and absorbed in God alone (Deut. 6:5)*
 - *The Law requires that we must meet the needs of others, with all the speed, eagerness, energy, and joy with which we meet our own (Lev. 19:18)*

Jesus’ response “do this and you will live” pointed the expert in the law to his utter inability to attain the perfect righteousness that the Law demands.

In Jesus’ confrontation with the rich young ruler, we see a similar theme. Jesus sought conviction of sin as He “looked at him (the rich young ruler) and loved him.”

You know the commandments: “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.” “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One more thing you lack,” He said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven. Then come, follow me.” At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth (Mark 10:19-22).

Jesus is not adding something new to the requirements of the law! He is doing nothing more than an exposition of the FIRST commandment.

II. THE RICHES AND POVERTY OF GOD

In Luke 10, Jesus is seeking to bring the expert in the law to despair of any salvation through his personal efforts. Do we believe that on our very best days, our best works and our most moral efforts make us beggars clothed in filthy rags before a holy God. Both the expert in the law and the rich young ruler resisted Jesus.

Jesus is not telling us that we can be saved by imitating the Good Samaritan. Rather He is seeking to humble us with the love God *requires* so that we will be able to receive the love God *offers*.

III. MERCY IS NOT OPTIONAL

The work of mercy is fundamental to being a Christian.

Jesus uses the work of mercy to show us the essence of the righteousness God requires in our relationships.

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (James 2:15-17)

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us love not with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:17-18)

IV. MERCY IS A TEST

- To ignore the needs of a poor man is to sin against the Lord (Proverbs 14:31; 19:17)
- True faith is judged on the merit of fruit (Matt.25:31-46, expanding on Prov. 19:17)
- A sensitive social conscience and a life poured out in deeds of mercy to the needy is the inevitable outcome and sign of true faith (Is. 1:10-17)

V. MERCY IS NOT NEW

- Genesis 2:15- Man is expected to cultivate and develop the Garden of Eden, enhancing its beauty, usefulness, and fruitfulness
- ***pre-fall man was as concerned with the physical-material world as the spiritual***
- the first act of mercy directly follows the fall (Gen. 3:21)
- Before the giving of the Law, Job knew that the righteousness God required included providing shelter, food, and clothing to the needy (Job 24:1-21; 31:16-23; 29:16-17.)
- In the Law, God ***required*** social righteousness.
 - a. gleaning from the harvest (Ex. 23:10-11- a dignified feeding of the poor!)
 - b. priests giving to the poor out of the tithes (Deut. 14:28-29)
 - c. Moving slaves toward self-sufficiency (Deut. 15:12-15)
- The prophets taught that materialism and **ignoring the plight of the poor** is as repugnant as idolatry and adultery (Amos 2:6-7) and that the Messiah would be characterized by **mercy to the poor** (Is. 11:1-4; 61:1-2)

VI. THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR

- Jesus' first sermon highlighted his mercy to the poor (Is. 61)
- In his incarnation Jesus became poor by becoming human. He became a member of an impoverished family which offered pigeons at his circumcision (Luke 2:24; Lev. 12:8), the offering that was required of the poorest families.
- In his ministry Jesus associated with the outcasts of society
- A special class of officers- deacons- are raised up within the early church to pursue the ministry of mercy

VII. CHRIST, OUR MODEL

- The true Adam, who is subduing all creation to God (Rom. 5:14-21)
- The true High Priest who can give to all in need (Heb. 4:14-16)
- The great Deacon who identifies with the poor (2 Cor. 8:9)

For discussion/reflection:

1. How does our mercy to the needy reflect the love of Christ?
2. What needs to happen in your life before you can give mercy?? How will these changes take place??
3. Where in Scripture is the necessity of mercy established?
4. Do you think of mercy as an option?? Why??
5. What are some of the areas where you are challenged by Christ's model of mercy??
6. Are you tempted to seek the pleasure of your heavenly Father through a better imitation of the Good Samaritan?

Note: All of these study notes are drawn from *Ministries of Mercy- The Call of the Jericho Road*, written by Timothy J. Keller. P&R Publishing, Second edition 1997. This book is available on Amazon.com and also on cvbbs.com (Cumberland Valley Bible Book Service; an excellent online source for books and study materials from a reformed perspective.)