

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 III.
The Character of Mercy

He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. (Luke 10:34-35)

“The ministry of mercy is the meeting of ‘felt’ needs through deeds. As agent of the kingdom, the church seeks to bring substantial healing of the effects of sin in all areas of life, including psychological, social, economic, and physical.” (Keller, p. 45)

The model of the Good Samaritan:

- He began by being a physical advocate. (“He went to him”). This is a picture of the work of Christ, our Advocate (I Jn 2:1)
- He provided critical medical treatment, transportation to shelter, medical care, and established a fund for the man’s rent.
- ***The scope of his mercy: physical, financial, emotional***

The ministry of mercy: the meeting of felt needs through deeds

I. HUMAN NEEDS

“Grace has to do with a man’s merits, but mercy has to do with man’s misery.”

- Mercy: the impulse that make us sensitive to hurts or lacks in others and makes us desire to alleviate them.
- Since the fall, man is under a curse and unfilled dependencies in life bring emptiness, frustration, and pain.

Four Alienations that are the result of the fall (Gen 3:7-19)

A . Alienation from God (*Theological*)

1. (Gen 3:8) It was no longer natural for man to walk with God. *This is most fundamental alienation we experience; all others flow from it.*
2. Sinful people cannot dwell with a holy God. (Ex. 19:20-22; 33:18,20)
3. We focus on our own comfort and happiness- we live for our own glory-thus there is a collision between God and man.
4. Yet, we were designed for fellowship with God. We cannot live with Him and we cannot live without Him.

We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face...only in Christ is it taken away...And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

For God, who said "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Cor. 3:13-14, 18; 4:6)

B. Alienation from Self (*Psychological*)

1. Each of us was given a heart to worship God
2. Unhappiness, guilt, fear, loss of personal identity, tormenting self-consciousness, depression, anxiety, suicide, substance abuse, sexual problems- all have a psychological root (and flow from alienation from God)
3. Only a new heart can give us self-worth
4. If we reject God, our hearts must manufacture idols which we believe will give us fulfillment (Rom 1:25; Col. 3:5)
5. No idol can fill the void- in Christ alone can we escape this psychological disintegration (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24)

C. Alienation from Others (*Social*)

1. Those who rebel against God also hide from one another. Look at the blame-shifting and backbiting of Genesis 3:12-13!!
2. C.S. Lewis shows that psychological disintegration leads to social disintegration:

There are two ways in which the human machine goes wrong. One is when human individuals drift apart from one another, or else collide with one another and do one another damage....The other is when things go wrong inside the individual-when the different parts of him (his different faculties and so on) either drift apart or interfere with one another...As a matter of fact, you cannot have the one without the other. (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

3. Social problems (loneliness, interpersonal conflicts, marital and family problems, poverty, class struggle) all stem from sin.

D. Alienation from Nature (*Physical*)

1. At the time of the fall, God declares to Adam and Eve that they are cut off from nature. (Gen. 3:17-19)
2. Nature itself longs for redemption (Rom. 8:19-21)
3. Our world is but a dim reflection of what it will be like without sin.
4. "We will fight the dirt all our lives, and in the end we will be six feet under it" (Keller, p. 51)
5. George Whitfield: "Dost thou know why the wild animals fear and growl and shriek at thee?? Because they know thou hast a quarrel with their Master!"

II. THE KING'S HEALING HANDS

A. The Judge Comes to Heal

1. Ps. 96:11-13. There is great rejoicing when Christ comes to rule

B. Healing will extend to all of life and nature

1. Rom 8:20-21
2. Isaac Watts' paraphrase of Ps. 96:

Joy to the world! the Savior reigns
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy.

C. Total reversal of the fall (Watts, con't)

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.

D. The KINGDOM OF GOD is the means for the renewal of the entire world and every discipline of life.

III. THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM

(Note: these are Keller's points. Each deserves far more thought than we can devote in this class)

A. God created the world to be under His rule and authority

B. Sin disrupted the rule of God and has infected the world

C. Christ came to bring the Kingdom of God back to reign on earth

D. The Kingdom comes in two stages.

- It has already come partially through the incarnation of Christ
- It will come totally and fully at Christ's return

E. Entrance to the Kingdom NOW is through repentance and faith

F. The kingdom power of God moves His people out to meet the needs of a fallen world, bringing the blessing of God far as the curse is found

G. Healing will be substantial but not total in all areas of life, because the kingdom is not yet fully come.

H. The church is a pilot plant of the kingdom. It demonstrates to the world what life looks like under the kingship of Jesus Christ

I. The church is an agent of the kingdom. It is to model the healing of God's rule AND spread it.

IV. HUMAN DEEDS

- The needs of society are easily seen. But only the illumination of the Holy Spirit will allow anyone to understand that all of these needs flow from our alienation from God.
- “Felt needs” can be the door to more fundamental needs. When unbelievers see Christians feeding the hungry, supporting the weak, etc. their hearts can be softened to Christ.

V. DEED MINISTRY

- Ministry of the Word is needed to heal the fundamental alienation (alienation from God)
- Deed Ministry addresses the other alienations.
- In Luke 22:24-27 and I John 3:17-18, Christ declares that He himself is a deacon (“I am among you as one who serves”)

...for further thought and reflection:

- 1. Which of the four alienations as a result of the fall do you see most profoundly affecting your every day life??**
- 2. How will the second coming of Christ restore those areas??**
- 3. What is the relationship between the restoration that the second coming of Christ will bring and the partial restoration that the present Kingdom of God brings?**
- 4. How is ministering to another’s physical needs a spiritual act?**

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.)