

## Sermon Notes, October 22, 2017

### The Christian Lifestyle: Mercy-Costly Love Pt. 2, Ephesians 4-25-32, James 2-14-17

In Ephesians 4:25–32, we’re focusing in on what Paul says in v. 28, because it is a marvelous example of the Christian lifestyle. In v. 28 he says, “He who has been stealing must steal no longer ... but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.” Paul is actually saying here, “A thief stops being a thief when he becomes generous.” He’s really going this far. Paul is telling us that there are two purposes for work. One is to make yourself useful to mankind through your work, but then the second purpose is to make money so you can give it away.

If this was the only place it’s mentioned, you could say, “You’re reading too much in.” That’s a problem, because everywhere you look, anywhere you look, you see this woven within everything else the Bible talks about when it comes to the Christian lifestyle. That is, a compassionate heart for the poor.

In Romans 15 Paul says that taking care of the poor is at least as important as him going & preaching Christ in Rome. He says, “This is an integral part of my ministry. This is critical. This is not an option.”

The parable of the Good Samaritan. After questioning Jesus about eternal life, the law expert tries to justify himself & asks Jesus, “What do you mean I have to love my neighbor? Who is my neighbor?” At the end of the parable, Jesus asks the law expert, “Who was the hero in this parable?” He says, “The one who showed mercy.” The law expert sums up everything the Samaritan does under the heading *mercy*.

We’re talking about here what is called the ministry of mercy, a term which we get from the good Samaritan parable: “The one who showed mercy.” The fact is, this is not an option.

The ministry of mercy is not an option for you personally.

The ministry of mercy is not an option for us corporately.

#### 1. First of all, what is the ministry of mercy?

Basically, the *ministry of mercy* is meeting human needs through deeds. It says in Luke 24:19, “Jesus was mighty in word and deed.” Everywhere you read about Jesus, it never says he *just* preached. He didn’t just *talk* about the kingdom of God; he *exhibited* the kingdom of God through deeds.

One of the results of sin is that we experience needs. Felt needs. Hunger. Thirst. Disease. Sickness. Poverty. Felt needs. The only way to deal with those needs is through deeds. When the Holy Spirit gives out spiritual gifts into the Body of Christ—the Church—he gives out *word gifts* and *deed gifts*.

*In the Bible*, you see that there are two classes of officers in the church: elders & deacons. Elders are word ministers & deacons are deed ministers. There are two classes of officers and two classes of gifts because the church, like Jesus himself, is not supposed to simply *talk* but *do*.

#### 2. Secondly, here’s what the Bible says about the *importance* of it.

The texts on mercy are very challenging and demanding passages. Isaiah 1:10–17. We’re told here’s how you know if you’re a real believer. Not by whether you come to church, not by whether you are obeying the moral law, but whether or not you’re generous to people who are in need.

Then in Matthew 25 it gets worse. Jesus tells about how on the last day he will appear before everybody and he’s going to divide the sheep from the goats. These are people who are *real* Christians divided from people who *think* they’re Christians. True from false believers. How is Jesus going to decide that? On the last day, he’s going to look at some and say, “When I was hungry you fed me. When I was thirsty you gave me drink. When I was naked you clothed me. When I was shelter-less you gave me shelter. and when I was in prison you visited me.” Jesus is not saying we are saved by works. What Jesus is actually saying is that the poor man in your midst is a test of whether you really are a Christian and whether you really do know Jesus and have a relationship with him.

Luke 16, is the story of Lazarus, the beggar, at the gates of the rich man, who had no mercy on him. Lazarus is a test at what was in the rich man’s heart. Jesus is saying, “If you want to know what’s really in your heart, the index of real faith is whether or not you’re generous to people like that.”

It gets worse. James 2. That's where James says, "You say you have faith, but I say unto you, faith without works is dead." He says, "Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." The Bible teaches we're saved by faith alone but not by a faith which *is* alone. You're saved by faith not by works, but your faith always will issue in works. Here's how you're going to know if you have real faith: whether or not it issues in the ministry of mercy.

### 3. Thirdly, the *dimensions* of the ministry of mercy.

What are the dimensions of it? The Bible says, "He who does not take care of his own family is worse than an unbeliever." You *do* have a first and primary responsibility to care for *a person in need who's related to you or who's in your church or who you're in fellowship with some way or another*. But the purpose of the good Samaritan parable is to say you must not limit the people you help by their group. Not only that, you also have to be careful about limiting the dimensions of your giving.

Jonathan Edwards wrote a tract on the ministry of mercy. He says, "Take a look at Galatians 6:2 where it says, 'Bear one another's burdens.'" He said, listen, "We may, by the rules of the gospel, be obliged to give to others when we cannot do it without suffering ourselves ... How else will we bear one another's burdens? If we be never obliged to relieve others' burdens, but when we can do it without burdening ourselves, then how do we bear our neighbor's burdens when we bear no burden at all?"

C.S. Lewis's words on Christian giving should strike a chord in all of our hearts. He says that the Christian's generosity will always cause our lives to look radically different from our unbelieving neighbors. He writes: "I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare ... If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they [our expenditures] are too small."

The *dimensions* of it. You're not bearing somebody's burden unless some of the weight has shifted to you so you're feeling some of the same stress, pressure, and pain that he or she is. You're supposed to be sacrificing and letting the burdens of other people fall back on you.

### 4. The impact.

The Bible tells us whenever Christians were really doing that, it had a tremendous impact on the society around them. In Acts 2 & 4, inside the community the giving was so radical no one was ever in need. *No one*. The radical giving of the Christian community astonished people. The outside world saw that, and we're told that lent tremendous power to the preaching of the apostles. Our detractors in our culture today need to see this. People on the outside need to be seeing this, seeing the sacrificial love and generosity of Christians. That gives credence to our proclamation of the gospel.

### 5. What is the *dynamic*, what is the motivation in the New Testament for the ministry of mercy?

What the Bible says is, "Look and see who you are." Matthew 18. A king has a servant who owes the king millions and millions of dollars. And the king forgives the servant. The servant says, "Have mercy on me." *Mercy*. But then look at what the first servant does to the second servant. No mercy. One of the things he's saying is this. It's very simple. When you look at the person who is in need, a Christian says, "I'm looking in a mirror. This is how I look ... Look at this poor person. Look at this person with all of these troubles. This is how I look to God apart from Jesus Christ. What tremendous debt I had, and what astonishing resources I received from my King Jesus who has lavished me with grace & forgiveness and new life." Jesus Christ, who was rich, became poor. Why? Because we were poor, spiritually bankrupt.

If you know you're a sinner saved by grace, it makes you radically generous.