

Jesus' Movement of Mercy

By Craig Manners

As Christians, we often look for signs from God as to what we are to do with our lives while we wait for Heaven. We sometimes look in the wrong places, and possibly get the wrong message.

Yet, God has made it very easy for us. It is not complicated. It requires no special training or gifts. And no patience in waiting for years on end before we act. It fits in with whatever career choice we make, or stage of life we are in.

Having been given a new heart and a new spirit, God's people naturally want to please God. So, we read the Bible to find out what He is like, and what we should do for our remaining earthly years. As we read, we find that God reveals to us His special love for families, children without a parent, for the weak, needy, widows, unborn babies, the poor, and those in distressing situations like prisoners.

"This is love for God: to obey his commands" (1 John 5:3) ... such as: "to love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt. 19:19), "look after orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27), "do good to all people" (Gal. 6:10), be a Good Samaritan (Luke 10:37), feed the hungry, provide for the needy, care for the sick, visit the prisoner (Matt. 25:35-36).

Luke 10:25-37 is a very confronting passage of Scripture. One which is very familiar to many, yet we always need its message afresh.

In this passage, Jesus tells us a parable of a man travelling on the Jericho road who was, out of the blue, beaten and robbed and left for dead. Often people in this fallen world find themselves beaten down and left half dead by life. So many things could go wrong at any time, and sometimes several at once, leaving even seemingly well-off, successful people on the verge of ruin, death, homelessness or despair. An accident, job loss, financial shock, loss of a loved one, or a terminal illness.

The man from Samaria stopped and helped the man in his helpless state and time of need.

In this passage we are given some helpful

information. We find that anyone in need is our neighbour. There are no exceptions, no conditions, no "deserving" poor.

When Jesus saw us on that road in desperate need of earthly and eternal help, He put no conditions on us. We were His enemy (Romans 5:10). We did not deserve His help. Yet He saw us, He stopped, and He helped us.

We learn that it is helpful to put ourselves in the position of those we help. This is what Jesus did to the religious law expert in His parable by making the man on the Jericho Road a Jew, someone who the Jewish scholar could associate with, rather than having the Samaritan man as the one in need of help. The one in need today or tomorrow may well be you! You are not immune.

We see that this was comprehensive help, meeting a variety of needs: emergency medical attention, transportation, shelter, advocacy, financial assistance, and a follow-up visit.

It was confronting help, cleaning up and bandaging open wounds, it was personally sacrificial help, and it was costly help. The care dispensed included items such as bandages, oil, wine and money, as well as disruptions to the carer's schedule, the hardship of having to walk instead of ride his own donkey on that steep, rough, Jericho Rd, and the disruption of a follow-up visit to check on his recovery.

Why would we do any of this? Because of what Christ did for us. We only love, through sharing the Gospel message and doing acts of mercy, because Christ first loved us, and performed an amazing act of mercy for us when we were dying on our Jericho Rd. Jesus came to us on that road. He had compassion on us. He is our Good Samaritan.

Our doing good is a response to, and the fruit of, Jesus doing good to us. There is no room for self-righteousness, and all glory goes to Jesus.

It is Jesus giving us a mandate, permission and encouragement to focus our attention, energy, resources, and time on ministries of mercy, on doing good deeds.

This is a call from Jesus to individual Christians, families, businesses, and whole congregations to look outward, to seek opportunities to help, to be creative, be generous and lavish in doing good. To not hold back.

Jesus is our model. Like Jesus, we too care deeply for all human suffering, but especially eternal suffering, so our deeds need to be accompanied with the message of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. After all, this is where the true help is to be found that every soul needs.

As 17th Century preacher Richard Baxter put it, “We are members of the world and of the church, and must labour to do good to many; and therefore we have greater work to do on earth than merely securing our own salvation. We are entrusted with our Master’s talents for His service, to do our best in our places, to propagate his truth and grace, to edify His church, honour His cause, and promote the salvation of as many souls as we can.” All this is to be done on earth, while we wait for heaven.

We are living on the Jericho Road, our church meets on the Jericho Road, we work on the Jericho Road. So, keep your eyes open for people in need and remember Jesus’ words in v37: “Go and do likewise.”

Let’s seek opportunities to serve and help people in need and watch and see how God responds. In these culturally dark and lost times, maybe Christians in the West could just double down and more intentionally ramp up mercy ministry. While we wait for heaven, let’s aim to be as active as we can in doing good to others.

Combining deeds of mercy with evangelism and discipleship allows us to reach into our community, break down barriers and plant seeds of good in people’s lives. Helping to heal a broken heart, a community, a nation.

We generally should be people who aim to meet the needs of people around us, no matter who they are. Christians are to do good in their community in so many ways that people should not only notice but be confounded and confused by us.

With prayer and faith, this could have a ripple effect and cause a groundswell of change in our community, advancing the Gospel and God’s Kingdom.

In A.D. 361 Roman Emperor Julian noticed the Christians doing lots of mercy ministry in the community and said, “It is disgraceful that... while the Christians support their own poor as

well as ours, all men see that our own people lack aid from us”.

Throughout other periods of history, it has often been the Christians stepping up to help people. During plagues, famines, natural disasters, and pandemics, often putting themselves at personal risk to help people.

The greatest good we can do for a fellow human being is of course to share the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ with them. Along with mercy ministries, what better way to spend our time while we wait for Heaven.

Eventually, as the early Christians did to the Romans, we too will confound those around us, and potentially God may use us as a witness to lead many to heaven.

There are many “causes” or “movements” people around us are devoting their lives to. Many different banners are rallying followers, and many, especially young people, are answering those calls without really thinking through what it is they are committing to follow, nor what the consequences of those movements will be for individuals, families, communities and nations.

The cause of following Jesus Christ is time-tested, and consistently shown to be good for individuals and societies in many ways. It leads to true and lasting joy, peace, good friendships and relationships, healthy bodies and minds, and good practical outcomes now and for eternity.

It gives true and enduring meaning and purpose to one’s life. It leads people to look beyond their own circumstances and to be grateful and content rather than being consumed with discontentedness or despair, or burdened by grievance thinking.

It motivates and energizes people to do good, kind, practical acts of mercy to everyone, no matter their past mistakes, their age, looks, race, worldview, religion, political persuasion or which of the latest banners, popular trends or fashions they may be following.

As we embark on our 56th year in 2024, we invite old and new prayer, financial, and volunteer supporters to join with us in working together to continue to advance, and even to rapidly scale up, Jesus’ 2000+-year-old “movement of hope and mercy”, as together we, “Go and do likewise,” through Temcare.

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