

# Mercy Ministry Conference Talk

September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015

## Love Based Generosity

Introduction:

Building up to this conference I have fielded a lot of questions. Most of them were already in our minds as we thought up this idea, but I think as we begin it may be helpful to sort through a couple of the big ones.

**1. Why a Mercy Ministry Conference?** With all the big issues going on in the world and the church right now, why are we studying this topic together? Shouldn't we be having a conference on how to deal with Homosexuality or Worship or how to deal with the fact that our culture is declining? The short answer is that we as Deacons believe that this whole idea of showing mercy is not just important, it is essential to our faith. I think you will see after our time together that Mercy Ministry is not just a fundamental part of our ministry, it is part of who we are as Christians.

**2. Why did we not hire an actual professional to teach this conference?** This conference is just as much about community as it is about teaching. Certainly we as Deacons want to share with you our wisdom and understanding after studying this topic over the past couple of years and living it out in your lives and others, but in large part this is about us gathering together as a Community to have the opportunity to connect on this crucial issue and share our thoughts and ideas. This time is meant to be an interactive time when we can discuss what we are thinking and share our experiences with one another in an effort to better understand how to do this thing called Mercy Ministry.

Okay, with those things in our minds, let's turn to the topic at hand.

Tonight's talk is a foundational one. I want to set the groundwork for what we are going to be learning tomorrow when Warren and Jeff present to us. I also want to deal with a few obstacles that we may face in our lives and hearts as we wrestle with this topic.

I have used the phrase Mercy Ministry a lot. What in the world am I talking about? This phrase is an umbrella for all the needs meeting work of the Church. If you think of it, as we do, in terms of the officers of the church, The Elders are in charge of overseeing the ministry of Word, and the Deacons are in charge of overseeing the ministry of Deed, or mercy ministry. So what is this ministry of deed that I am talking about? Well we will have a lot more details on that tomorrow, but suffice it to say for tonight, that we are talking about anything the body needs that can't be handled with a kind word, but needs a little more substance. The Bible is very clear that this ministry is not just one of the Deacons

tasks, but is really part of the life of every believer. We are to be Mercy-Full type of people as followers of Christ. But how do we do that? Why do we do that?

Tonight we are going to talk about where Mercy Ministry comes from, and yes, you guessed it, it starts in the heart. **If we start from the wrong foundation and have a wrong motivation and have a wrong goal we will not only damage the hearts of others, but we can do damage to our own hearts. I have titled my talk, Love Based Generosity, because I believe when we truly understand the kind of love we ought to have toward one another it will overflow in generous meeting of one another's needs.**

What I want to do tonight is

**First: Meditate on three passages that shed light on how we can have the right foundation, motivation and goal for our mercy ministry.**

**Second: We will discuss some of the obstacles in our own hearts and in our culture to meeting the needs or showing mercy to those around us.**

## **First:**

### **1. The Foundation: Luke 10:25-37 Love Your Neighbor As Yourself**

Context: Right after sending out the seventy and proclaiming that the Disciples are blessed because they see Him for who he is, Luke records this account of a certain Lawyer who challenges Jesus in an attempt to trip him up and give reason to condemn Him.

Lawyer: Expert in the Law, specifically an expert in the Mosaic Law with all the adjustments made by the NT Pharisaical system.

His Question: How do I have eternal life? Answer: Jesus turns the question back on him and he answers rightly (he's an expert after all) and summarizes the law of God with the greatest and second greatest commandments.

Jesus confirms that he is correct and he must keep all the law to have eternal life.

Realizing his predicament, the Lawyer tries to hedge a little bit. Maybe if he makes the law more achievable he can keep it. Who really is my neighbor? Jesus answers with one of His most famous parables about the good Samaritan.

Does Jesus answer the Lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbor?"

Notice the genius behind Jesus parable: The Lawyer was attempting to fence off the law of God to an achievable level by reducing the number of people who are his "neighbor's" to a manageable number. Then he could be neighborly to all the right people. Instead of going along with this ridiculousness, by the end of the parable, Jesus

has an entirely new question for the Lawyer than the one he asked, "Who has been a neighbor?" Do you see it? The issue is not who we must care for, it is the attitude of our hearts when confronted with the needs of others! This lawyer is concerned about who he must show mercy to, thereby betraying that he does not have a heart ready to show mercy!

The command to love our neighbor as ourselves starts in our hearts. Are we ready to be a neighbor, or are we more concerned about discovering exactly who our neighbor really is? If we are ready to be a neighbor we can ask, "How is someone a neighbor?" Look at the parable. How did the Samaritan, the hero of the story, obey the Lord's commandment? He showed mercy. That is how we love our neighbor as ourselves, we show them mercy, we care for them, we have compassion on them, just as we would want for ourselves.

But we have another deeper picture of love given to us in the Scriptures:

## **2. The Motivation: I John 3:16-17 Love as Christ Loved You**

Context: The letter of John is written to a group of people who are confused. Some of their favorite and most zealous members have left the church and now are saying they have the truth and John's teaching is messed up. For the sake of these confused believers John wants to make it clear exactly what a Christian is and isn't, and how they may know they have eternal life (I John 5:13 sound familiar?). In the process of writing his letter of encouragement John focuses repeatedly on love. For him, love for the brethren, the body, is a critical indicator of whether can know you are a believer or not. Right in the center of the book he gives us this succinct summary of what he has been getting at: **Read the passage**

Let's meditate on the first part of vs 13 for just a second. Jesus, Creator of the Earth, ruler over all things, is dwelling in Heaven with God the Father and God the Spirit in perfect communion and fellowship in the Godhead, needing nothing. He is fully perfect in Himself and living in completely perfect bliss. He chooses to leave that place and come to earth and be born, as a baby no less, and deal with all the pain and hurt and frustration and disgusting bodily functions of a human body and insults and injuries of other men and bear with and care for a rag tag bunch of fishermen and tax collectors who will abandon Him with the going gets tough, until he can reach His ultimate goal which is to be maligned, and insulted and beaten and whipped and spat on and dragged up onto a torture device designed to force you to choose between suffocation and bleeding to death and ultimately worse than anything He is cut off from the perfect communion with His Father and the Spirit for that moment when God pours out all His anger on Him for our sin and He dies.

No let's read the rest of the verse. Let us lay down OUR lives. Well, of course, we say! I am ready to lay down my life just like Jesus! We are ready to die for our brothers and

sisters! Like Peter we are ready to unsheath our sword and go to do battle for King and Kingdom...Only John doesn't stop there. You see, this Christlike sacrificial life doesn't involve our actual death 99.9% of the time, it requires our sacrificial mercy-showing that is described in vs. 14. How can someone who has known the love of Christ poured out on them through His sacrificial loving dying on the cross **ever** shut up his or her heart to the brother in need? We...do...it...all...the...time. His point is not to sell all our worldly goods, no no, we are to be generous with them. Not shut up our hearts, but open our hearts to the fullest as Christ did for us when we chose to give up all things in order that we might be saved.

Okay, if that wasn't deep enough, we are going one layer deeper in our meditation on this love based generosity:

### **3. The Goal: John 17:20-23 Love as God loves Christ**

Context: Jesus is at the Last Supper with His disciples and he takes that opportunity to pray for them. His prayer broadens to the portion we are going to read and He prays for all who will believe in Him. We have learned through David's teaching that what we pray is a strong indicator of where our heart is, and through this prayer we can see Jesus heart desire for us as His followers and so with that in mind, let's read. **Read the passage.**

What is this oneness Jesus is talking about? It is this perfect communion that He has with the Father. It is the perfect Love that They share one with another. No disunity, no confusion, not miscommunication, no hatred, no arrogance, no pride, no disgust, no condescension, no pride, none of that, simply love in its most perfect form, for as John says in Chapter 4 of his epistle, God is Love. Jesus is praying to God the Father, and continues to pray this, we can be sure, that we would be one in heart and mind and fellowship even as They are! Is this not mind blowing? We are working toward the ultimate goal of altogether loving one another as completely as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit love one another...sharing everything and experiencing everything with one mind and heart and spirit.

Does this put into context the request you receive for assistance? Does this help you to rethink when you are frustrated at the needs of the people you talk to? Does this make you want to reach out to one another with a renewed interest in knowing one another and sharing with one another? Does this make you want to share this love with others? How can they not know this kind of love?! We must share it with them!

Summary:

This is the generous spirit that flows from a heart overflowing with Love. It is not that we are never discouraged, but now every need and challenge is put into its proper context. We love as we love ourselves, as Christ loves us, and truly as God loves Christ.

**For some of you I hope you now feel the weight of what you have been called to do, and how you have been called to live. If you have been hard hearted or cold in the past, I hope you see a window into how to develop a merciful heart, a Loving Heart, a generous heart.**

**For those of you who are sensitive of Conscience and already feel weighed down by this requirement, I want you to remember this: Jesus made the Samaritan the Hero of his Parable, not the righteous man; Jesus loved us and came and died for us while we were still sinners; and lastly, Jesus has prayed and is continuing to pray for us.**

Now that said let's turn to look secondly at some potential obstacles.

## **Second:**

Potential Obstacles:

What are some Obstacles you find in your own life to this sort of overflowing love?

Receive feedback from the congregation on their obstacles that they face.

Some of my obstacles:

1. Church as a Destination for Theological Instruction, not a Community of friends caring for one another
2. Personal Property Rights: I earned this with my own hard work and if they worked as hard they could have it too!
3. Consumerism/Assumed Necessities: Our lives are full of these. Retirement plans, Two and ½ cars, Netflix, Smartphones, Spare bedrooms, Insurance, Air Conditioning, etc. None of these things are bad!! But if they get in the way of sacrificing for someone, then we have to ask if they are an obstacle to our ministry to one another.
4. Fear of getting hurt or hurting someone else: This is a real and legitimate issue. Many of us simply don't feel qualified to tackle the issues of those in our body who are in need, or those outside our body who are in need. Don't be afraid to face this fear, simply realize you have it and begin to take steps to overcome it through small ministry opportunities, through discipleship and study. Loving your neighbor as yourself is tricky, but when it comes down to it, it starts with loving, and the rest begins to flow.

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**September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**Love Based Generosity**

**Why A Mercy Ministry Conference?**

**What is Mercy Ministry? Who does it and how?**

**Love Based Generosity:**

**1. The Foundation: Luke 10:25-37 Love Your Neighbor As Yourself**

**2. The Motivation: I John 3:16-17 Love as Christ Loved You**

**3. The Goal: John 17:20-23 Love as God loves Christ**

**Potential Obstacles to this Love Based Generosity:**