

*“Moved With Compassion,
Jesus Stretched Out His Hand and Touched Him”*

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Read Mark 1:40-45

As I work through Mark’s Gospel and the life of Jesus Christ, I have been challenged to become more aggressive in emphasizing the role of the local church in mercy ministries. It appears unfortunate but we fail to hold in tension evangelism of soul and ministries of “healing.” We must become the cup of cold water to the thirsty, we must become fathers to the fatherless, and we must become a shelter to the homeless. How do we come alongside those who are buckling under the weight of life? To have the mind of Christ without His hands or feet is restrictive and one dimensional. We must maintain the gospel, we must engage our culture, and we must build His church. None of these three items are capable of being neglected.

Our involvement in our community should be a real ministry expression of this local community. Our community is already trying to address these issues, but all attempts on their part are one dimensional. We must not deceive ourselves. It is only Christ and His church that can address the souls of these individuals. The church fails when it focuses on only one area and not both. It is never either or. It is always both the soul and the body. William Barclay notes how there are three pairs of things which Jesus never separated and we would do well to consider his observations.

First, He never separated **words and actions**.

The story is told of a student who bought the best possible books and the best possible equipment and got a special study chair with a special book rest to make study easy, and then sat down in the chair – and went to sleep.

The letters of Paul always place belief before behavior, but the two are never separated. Theology is the bedrock upon which the house of action is built. In the absence of theology, action is unbridled, and in the absence of action, theology is sterile. Right thoughts produce right behavior resulting in a fertile faith.

Second, He never separated **soul and body**.

“The task of Christianity is to redeem the whole man and not just part of him. It is quite wrong to talk about the social gospel as if it were an extra, or an option, or even a separate part of the Christian message. The Christian message is one and it preaches and works for the good of a man’s body as well as the good of his soul.” (William Barclay, The Gospel of Mark, DSBS, [Westminster John Knox Press, 1975], 42). This poses for us a real question, “Is the full gospel preached when it is not coupled with acts of mercy?”

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Third, He never separated earth and heaven.

Although we live in a period where the best is still yet to come, we cannot dismiss the present reign of our Lord in a real and immediate kingdom. Our justification, our union, our sanctification, our redemption, and our glorification are present and future realities in which we are to live each moment of every day.

In our desire to understand the intent of Scripture, we too quickly dismiss the impact and power of the present reign of Jesus Christ in and through His people. Our lives are rife with heartache and misery. We still exist in a world dominated by disappointment and discouragement. Yet I stand before you and openly declare that Jesus Christ is enough in this life and in the life to come. My friend, it cannot be any other way. There is a real and indivisible connection between the church local and the ministry of mercy to the needs of the community, the nation, and the world.

Being a Christian is inseparably verbal and visual. The gospel is a word and a work. It is the proclamation of deliverance and the demonstration of deliverance. The gospel not only declares people free, it sets people free. Just in Waukesha County alone the opportunities to impact our community with the body of Christ are enormous.

We must think through the implications of this idea from the larger truth of God's Word. It is the purpose of God in this period for the church universal and local to be God's channel through which His compassionate hand is felt by the non-believing, even if they continue to scorn Him.

This leads me to two closing thoughts.

First, it is foolish for us to reach our community with food if it is not preceded by faith. In our quest to be the hands and feet of Jesus in our community, let us not abandon the good news that is Jesus Christ.

Second, we must get involved in the mercy ministries of our community and turn these people to Christ and His church. It is only in Christ and His church that we can bring hope, healing, and wholeness to the depressed, the diseased, and the dysfunctional.