

## "Be the Neighbour Others Need"

*Luke 10:25-37*

The Good Samaritan is so well-known that the phrase 'Good Samaritan' is used to describe someone – usually a stranger – who goes out of his/her way to help someone in distress. The parable itself is that; a stranger goes out of his way to help an individual in great distress, probably even a life-saving situation.

However, we may not realize, the parable is used to answer a question asked by a religious expert ['lawyer' in many versions], which means he's at the top of the scribe list, who is attempting to make Jesus look foolish. Spoiler alert: it didn't work.

Again, this is another occasion when Jesus was asked, 'What is the greatest commandment?' The religious leaders loved to rate the commandments. They often debated which one was the most important - just for the sake of debating - but also as we saw last week and will see again here, they rated the commandments into greater or lesser categories to avoid obeying some, supposing that they contradicted each other. Like,

- I can't help someone in need on a Sabbath because that means work and the Sabbath is a greater commandment.
- Or I can't help out my parents financially because the money I have is dedicated to Him as a tithe or an offering which is more important

Jesus gives a brilliant answer. It's not loving God over loving people, it's loving God with all you have AND loving your neighbour as you love yourself, which we love ourselves with all we have usually.

The two are intertwined. Obeying God's commands to love others like ourselves shows we have put God first in our lives. When we're all in for God, we are quick to show love to others. To love one another is rooted in our love for God. We cannot separate the two. Love for God requires faith while love for others acts on our faith. Failure in one always leads to failure in the other. So if you want to grow in loving others more, grow in your love for God. Then we'll learn what sacrificial love is and looks like and be more sensitive to doing that for others.

This lawyer had no interest to learn what it means to love God more or love others as himself. He came to 'test Jesus, so he thinks [like others had too] with "the question" to ask Jesus.

*"Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

He's asking Jesus 'What thing, what act must I perform that will result in me inheriting eternal life?' This is an ironic question because you don't earn inheritances, you receive them as a gift based on the death of someone close to you.

Jesus answers in typical Rabbinic fashion, with another question. What does the Torah say? The Torah/Bible has all the answers. This whole passage is one question answer dialogue. If you remove the parable, here's how the passage plays out:

- 25 "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Q # 1
- 26 And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"  
QUESTION # 2
- 27 And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." ANSWER # 2
- 28 And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE."  
ANSWER # 1
- 29 "And who is my neighbour?" QUESTION # 3
- 36 "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbour"  
QUESTION # 4
- 37 "The one who showed mercy" ANSWER # 4
- "Go and do the same." ANSWER # 3 & 1

The expert is trying to trap Jesus because he thinks he's smarter and has all the answers. Unfortunately, we too can sometimes fall into this trap.

## **Are We More Concerned about Being Right than Loving God? (10:25-28)**

When this self-proclaimed expert in the Law approaches Jesus, he wants to enter into a debate with Jesus. He believes He can trap Jesus by pinning Him into a specific interpretation or a Rabbi's camp and show why Jesus is wrong. The question is one of life's most important questions: how do I know I have eternal life? Some people don't believe we can even know the answer now. Others think their good works earn them a right standing with God.

The expert expects Jesus will give Him a list of things he must do in order that God will accept him. That's the way they thought. Instead, Jesus points him to where the answer already lies: "*What is written in the Law? How do you read it?*" So the expert gives the correct answer which is Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18 together. Jesus agrees and says 'This is the thing you need to do and you will live.

Because the religious expert knows the right answer he believes he does love God. But having the right answer is not the same as loving God and others. Sometimes the people who have all the answers can be the least loving. There is always a danger in knowing too much. Knowledge becomes our faulty standard by which we measure spiritual maturity. Jesus did not say 'Learn this and you will live' or 'study more and you will live', rather He said, 'Do this – love God, love your neighbour – and you will live.'

This of course is not very measurable. We sometimes measure our spirituality by what we do or know so we can compare ourselves to others'. This was a problem in Jesus' day and it still is today. Instead of dealing with our own sinful habits, we compare ourselves to others and so rationalize our sins. This is what the expert does next. He is not satisfied with Jesus' answer. He believes he is right and must prove Jesus is wrong. He believes his list keeping is better than Jesus' lack of lists and so he's going to try and justify himself by asking Jesus another question. Instead of

seriously asking Jesus to help him understand what it means to love God and others, he tries to justify his list of those he only wants to love! And they had these lists!!

But instead of answering the question; ‘Who is my neighbour?’ Jesus tells the parable and changes it to ‘Who acted like a neighbour?’ as how we measure we love God.

## **Do We Try to Justify our Disobedience** **By Our Selective Obedience? (10:29)**

Many Jews chose to show love to only other Jews. People like them. But not Gentiles and certainly not Samaritans. Jesus addressed this attitude in the sermon on the Mount when he said, “*You have heard it said [by your rabbis] ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemies’* “. The rabbis taught you only had to love those who loved you. And so they justified their disobedience to Scriptures they didn’t want to keep by focusing on the Scriptures they found easy to keep.

We do the same. We obey God minimally; not with our whole heart. We have our lists; read my bible today, spent a little time in prayer, even read the Daily Bread. Maybe even working on a verse to memorize. Am involved in some ministry. Check. Check. Check.

But there are Scriptures we avoid. We hang on to grudges and avoid certain people, refusing to forgive them as God in Christ has forgiven me. We rarely practice hospitality with people other than our family. We don’t give to the needy. And we almost never share the gospel. We are pretty good at justifying our disobedience by our list of minimal obedience.

This is the challenge of the parable. Do the thing the Bible says you must do if you want to live – I like how Jesus subtly changed that. It’s not about getting to heaven when you die, its about finding how to live now in the presence and peace of God.

<sup>11</sup> *You have made known to me the path of life; [now]  
you will fill me with joy in your presence, [starts here]  
with eternal pleasures at your right hand. [ends here]*

The parable is brilliant. A man – assumed to be a Jew but left unsaid purposely – is travelling down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jerusalem is 3400’ higher than Jericho. The ancient route is still there today. It is rugged terrain in the hills and has lots of places to hide. So it was dangerous where robbers often lay in hiding. One traveled in groups for safety. This man did not. He is robbed, beaten, and stripped. He is “half-dead” meaning he is unconscious, seriously injured and in need of treatment or death will soon come.

“*A priest happened to be going down*”. ‘Happened’ is the first word in the sentence. It is emphasized because nothing just happens by chance. The priest sees the man and passes over to the other side of the road. Why?

The man has no clothes so he is not identifiable by his dress. Jews dressed differently than Syrians, Samaritans or Gentiles. You recognized others by colour or style. He was unconscious so he could identify himself. The priest does not know whether he is Jew or gentile, dead or alive. He’s not supposed to touch the dead, so he doesn’t want to risk being declared unclean. This would be humiliating for a priest.

As a priest he is of the upper class. He probably rode a donkey, maybe even a horse. He may have been accompanied but Jesus leaves him alone. He could have helped him but he was afraid of his status within the community; he didn't want to be declared unclean. If he was declared unclean he couldn't attend worship for at least a whole week. And that's more important to God, isn't it? I can't be unclean before God. He leaves.

The Levite was a servant to the priest who also worked in the temple preparing sacrifices for the priest. He is following the priest. Because of the descent of the road you could see quite a way ahead. It is quite possible he saw what the priest did. He didn't act.

Notice the Levite gets a little closer. *"He came to the place, saw him and then passed by on the other side."* Again he could not tell if the man was alive or dead, Jew or Gentile. While he probably didn't want to risk being unclean, it wasn't as big as a social stigma to him as it was for the priest. He simply may have acted that way because the priest didn't. If a priest didn't think it was necessary why should he? Besides, for a Levite to show up a priest would be bad etiquette.

The Jewish audience would presume that the priest and Levite are leaving Jerusalem for Jericho since they have just finished their 2 weeks of service in the temple and now heading home. They just finished serving and worshipping God – showing their love for God – yet now they avoid loving a neighbour desperately in need.

Are we ever guilty of that? We spent time with God in the morning before we went to work/school/game/shopping/visit family. But when we get there we blow it. We fail to act as if we truly loved God like we thought we did earlier in the day. We came across a need that we were in a position to help but we chose not to

The priest and Levite feared what others thought. Instead of helping the man they neglected him. Neglect is another way we hurt people. We can justify our neglect because we weren't the reason they got hurt. But neglect is another way we hurt people because we could have helped them or encouraged them but we didn't.

The priest and Levite had an agenda. They wanted to get home. They did their ministry. They wanted to get home to family and interests and did not see that God had arranged this interruption as an opportunity for ministry. Selfishness, fear and neglect are all reasons why we don't love others – and therefore love God – like we should.

## **Are We Open to Accepts Interruptions are Divine Opportunities? (10:30-32)**

God intentionally interrupts our life every day to see if we have His agenda on our hearts. Sometimes we are so focused on doing our jobs so we can meet the deadline or reduce our task list that we fail to notice hurting people around us. Yes we have to go to the store, get the mail, hit the bank, pick up kids, thinking we have no time to interact with people we bump into along the way. A trip to get the mail in Westport or go to the grocery store can sometimes take half an hour.

When you and I are in heaven we will be completely happy following God's agenda. Might we be happier now if we follow God's agenda here more than our own?

The priest didn't help the man. A Levite didn't help the man. Who's going to help him? The expert and every Jewish listener knows what's coming next, *'Oh an everyday Jew will come next who*

*will humble the religious experts.” But no. A Samaritan. He too was travelling. He know he was on a journey.*

*he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> 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 big difference here is *“when he saw him he had pity/compassion.”* “Splanchna.” He was moved from within. He was deeply concerned. So he altered his agenda. He poured oil to stop bleeding. He poured wine to clean and disinfect the cuts. He bandaged the man’s wounds. He placed the Jewish man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and cared for him. Then the next day he had to leave but he paid the innkeeper to look after the man and said I will reimburse you for any other expense when I return. He showed love to this neighbour [one near you who has a need] at great risk. Which causes us to ask ourselves

## **Will We Count the Cost of Showing Compassion?** **(10:33-37)**

The Samaritan risked a lot here. First, by stopping he risked being attacked himself. 2) A Samaritan bringing an injured Jew to someone’s place, may have been misunderstood as the one who hurt him. 3) Inns were not known to be reputable places. What assurances did he have that the innkeeper would do as he asked and not just take his money? 4) He sacrificed time because he was going on a journey and this delayed him.

We often don’t want to sacrifice our time on people. But how do churches grow? By spending time with each other and building strong relationships. When we only think about church as what I’m getting or not getting out of it, we fail to see our responsibility to love others as ourselves.

Now Jesus comes back to the religious expert and says ‘Which of these three was a neighbour? Not willing to say the Samaritan, the expert says, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ The Samaritan is such a slap in the face to the expert here is because the Samaritans only believed in the 5 books of Moses; which is where *“love the Lord Your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And love your neighbour as yourself”* comes from. Yes, Jesus said, you had the right answer – you just failed to do what the word of God says. *“Go and do likewise”*.

So how do we summarize what Jesus said here about loving God and one another as ourselves?

How does God love you and me? God’s love is unconditional and unlimited. That’s God’s standard for showing we love God by loving others regardless of how they love us or how often they need our love. “Agape” – the word for love here, means to love without conditions. We know this in our heads, but does our heart respond into actions and words?

We need to stop comparing yourselves to what others do or don’t in order to make us feel better about ourselves. Admit our sinfulness and selfishness.

Adjust your agenda to God’s. It’s not our time; Time is God’s gift to us.

Yes, it will cost us but think of the dividends your investment of time and resources will pay off now and in eternity.

Be available. Every day. Pray and watch how God will interrupt our days so we can be His agents of compassion for each other as well as for the lost.

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