

## LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

A series on “The Importance of Love in the Life of the Believer” would hardly be complete without looking at what Jesus taught regarding loving our neighbor as ourselves. How important is it for us to do that? In both Matthew and Mark, Jesus was asked what the most important commandment was. His response? “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

<sup>38</sup>This is the first and great commandment. <sup>39</sup>And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

In other words, you can sum up the Ten Commandments in two—loving God with all your heart and loving your neighbor as yourself—so obviously loving our neighbor is important. But who is our neighbor? That question is asked of Jesus in the Bible, isn’t it? Not only is it asked—it is also answered—by Jesus’ teaching of what is commonly called the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Please turn in your Bible’s to Luke 10:25-29.

MacArthur suggests that most commentators miss the main point of the parable. In fact, he refers to it in one sermon as “The Most Misunderstood Parable” and believes the main point is to show the man who asked the question—and ultimately all of us—that we are sinners who fail to **keep** this command and consequently need a Savior. The context of *why* Jesus told this parable bears that out. Notice...

--The question asked in verse 25 “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” This lawyer—actually a scribe—was not a true seeker of salvation because he asked the question to “tempt”—to test—Jesus.

--Jesus answers the question about how to have eternal life with two questions of His own in verse 26.

**Question #1:** “What is written in the law?” Jesus points him to the source of truth for eternal life—the Scriptures. They didn’t have the NT at that time, but they did have the OT. God’s Word is the authority on how to get to heaven—not what man believes or thinks. So Jesus asks, What does the law say?

**Question #2:** “...how readest thou?” Is Jesus asking the same question in another way—or is He asking something different? I don’t want to be overly dogmatic on this one, but it seems to me Jesus is saying “what does it *mean*; what is your *understanding* of what the law says; how do you *interpret* it?”

--In verse 27 we see the scribe’s answer. Was he correct? He certainly was because Jesus told him so in verse 28 “Thou hast answered right...”

--That wasn’t the end of Jesus’ answer, though. He goes on to say “this do, and thou shalt live.” If you want eternal life, love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind—and your neighbor as yourself—and you will have it. Was Jesus teaching salvation by works? Was Jesus teaching that if you kept these two commandments you would be guaranteed heaven? No; Jesus was trying to show the scribe he was a **law-breaker**—not a law keeper!

**Romans 3:19-20** “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that **every mouth may be stopped**, and **all the world may become guilty before God**. <sup>20</sup>Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for **by the law is the knowledge of sin**.”

**Galatians 3:21-22** “Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which **could have given life**, verily righteousness should have been by the law. <sup>22</sup>But the scripture hath **concluded all under sin**, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

**James 2:10** “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”

Had the scribe been honest, he would have admitted that he loved **himself** more than he loved God or his neighbor. He didn’t see himself that way, though. Verse 29 “But he, willing to **justify himself**...” asks “And who is my neighbor?” In his mind, he “checked the box” in regards to loving God with all his heart—and also believed he loved his neighbor—his fellow Jews—as much as he loved himself. ‘I’m heaven-bound because I do both of these—unless the Teacher has some new definition of who my neighbor is.’

So Jesus tells this parable to correct the scribe's thinking and show him at least three things: 1) who his neighbor really was; 2) what real love for others looks like; and 3) how none of us love that way all the time and consequently are in need of mercy and salvation. My emphasis this morning will be on the second one—what loving our neighbor as ourselves looks like.

Let's now look at the parable itself, beginning with verse 30. Notice first...

**1. The calamity of the traveler** (v 30)

“And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.”

I don't do this nearly as often as I should—and my guess is that neither do you—but when we read of a person in the Bible traveling from city “A” to city “B,” we should look at a map in a study Bible to get at least an idea of the direction and distance. “Down from Jerusalem to Jericho” is an interesting expression because when we think of a map, “down” usually means to travel south. That isn't true in this case, however, because Jericho is between 15 and 17 miles **northeast** of Jerusalem. The “down” here refers to a descent in elevation from Jerusalem—which sits at about 3000 feet above sea level—to Jericho, which is about 1000 feet below sea level. The picture, then, is a long, downward hike.

Another good thing to consider is the *terrain* and what kind of journey it would be. Would it be easy—or difficult; safe—or hazardous?

A. The terrain

What was the terrain like on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho? A man by the name of Hackett described it like this in 1852: “If we might conceive of the ocean as being suddenly ... petrified when its waves are tossed mountain high, and dashing in wild confusion against each other, we should then have some idea of the aspect of the desert in which the Savior has placed so truthfully the parable of the Good Samaritan. The ravines, the almost inaccessible cliffs, the caverns, furnish admirable lurking-places for robbers. They can rush forth unexpectedly upon their victims, and escape as soon almost, beyond the possibility of pursuit.”

Most of those to whom Jesus told this parable would have been well familiar with the danger and difficulty of this trip just from the words “A man went from Jerusalem to Jericho...”

Notice next, B. The treatment

Verse 30 “and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.” How many thieves were there? We don't know. We also don't know how old the man was or how long he fended them off or what he had in the way of possessions. That obviously doesn't matter or God would have given us those details. What we do know, however, is that they beat him to the point of near death. Although it doesn't say they took his *belongings*, it is pretty safe to say that since they took the clothes off his back, we can rightly assume that they took everything else that belonged to him.

The need then, was real—it was not the man panhandling by the WalMart stop sign that may or may not be homeless and hungry. While on vacation, we saw a number of people riding in motorized shopping carts. Some obviously needed them—one man in particular I remember had a prosthetic leg from the knee down.

That wasn't always the case, however. Another time I was waiting in a crowded store and a younger woman came in on one of those carts and pulled into the corner by the container of free ice water. Thinking upon this passage—and realizing she would have a hard time getting her cart close enough—I was fully prepared to get a glass of water for her. I didn't need to, though. She easily got up out of the cart, walked over to the water dispenser, and got her own water with no sign of physical limitations whatsoever!

The man in our parable was not like that! Beaten, bloody, and lying helplessly on the ground in the extreme heat, it is not hard to imagine that he would not live to see another day if he did not get help. The calamity that fell upon the traveler was real—not pretend—and urgent.

Next, let's consider...

## **2. The callousness of those expected to help**

Notice verses 31-32: "And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side." I don't want to spend a lot of time on this, but I don't believe I'm going out on a limb to suggest that those who were listening to this parable unfold expected first the priest—then the Levite—to stop and help.

### A. The priest

The duties of the priests were to offer sacrifices and burn incense at the temple. They were the religious elite and knew the OT Scriptures well. They would have been familiar with verses like Micah 6:8 and Hosea 6:6.

**Micah 6:8** "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to **do justly, and to love mercy**, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

**Hosea 6:6** "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

The priest did not show mercy, however. "And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side."

### B. The Levite

Levites were assistants to the priests. They, too, were well familiar with the OT law and should have been willing to render assistance to a fellow Jew in his time of need. The Levite would probably have known **Leviticus 19:18** "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt **love thy neighbour as thyself**: I am the Lord." But he didn't help either, did he? Whereas the priest did not come near the man, the Levite did. Verse 32 says that "he came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side." Did their eyes meet? Probably not; the man was half dead. But here was a second religious man—another man who knew he should help—failing to do what he ought to have done.

Imagine hearing this parable as Jesus was telling it for the very first time. You could envision the man lying there, dying. Upon hearing that the priest was drawing near, you had hope that this would turn out well for the man but the priest kept going. Hope for the man again returns when you hear a Levite is approaching, but those hopes are dashed once again. Surely it won't end this way; the man needs help! You anticipate there will be a third passer-by to save the man, and then Jesus says "But a certain **Samaritan**..." That was the last thing they were expecting to hear!

## **3. The compassion of the one not expected to help**

What did the Jews think of Samaritans? They couldn't stand them; they hated them!

### A. The contempt Jews had for Samaritans

MacArthur writes: "The very existence of Samaritans was seen as an evil....They were a blight on the world....They were evil because they intermarried with the Gentiles when the Northern Kingdom was occupied. They were evil because they tried to disrupt the rebuilding of the Jewish city and the temple when they came back from the captivity. They were so evil that the Jews in 128 B.C. even attacked and destroyed their temple. They're half-breed traitors. In fact, if you wanted to say something bad about someone, you called them a Samaritan." People did that to Jesus in John 8:48 "Then answered the Jews, and said unto Him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?"

MacArthur then adds: "Their worst near enemy, despised, outcast, no access to the temple, no access to worship, no access to sacrifice, no access to God ...**does the right thing.**"

## B. The care the Samaritan has for this Jew (v 33-35)

--v 33 "...and when he saw him, he had compassion on him." He didn't avoid him; he didn't pass by on the other side. Instead, he approached him and had compassion on him. The compassion led to action—not just pity. He did something for him. In fact; he did a **lot** and Jesus explains that in detail.

--v 34 "And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine..."

--The half-dead man had no clothes, so in order to bind up his wounds, the Samaritan probably had to tear some of his own clothing to wrap the wounds and stop the bleeding

--The oil and wine were probably mixed together to provide a soothing antiseptic. Clarke in his commentary writes: "These, beaten together, appear to have been used formerly as a common medicine for fresh wounds. Bind up a fresh cut immediately in a soft rag or lint, moistened with pure olive oil, and the parts will heal by what is called the first intention, and more speedily than by any other means."

--"Set him on his own beast..." The Samaritan had probably been riding when he found the man, but "gave up his seat," so to speak, because the man he was helping couldn't walk. So he lifted him up—and probably walked beside him to ensure he didn't fall off—and they made their way toward Jericho.

--"and brought him to an inn, and took care of him." Not only did he take care of him, it seems he took care of him throughout the night because verse 35 says "And on the morrow..." In other words, he didn't just drop him off at the inn—he stayed there with him and did what he could to alleviate the man's suffering throughout the night. The compassion and care didn't end there, though.

--v 35 "And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, "Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee." So how much is two pence?

--It most certainly doesn't refer to two "pennies" in our present-day money system

--One Bible I have says \$64; another says two denarii—the equivalent of two day's worth of wages. Regardless of the exact amount, it was more than enough to help the man for an extended period of time.

## **4. Conclusions on love from this parable**

### A. Love is more than labels

What do I mean by that? Love is more than just a label; it is more than a name or a title. If anyone knew of the importance of loving others as themselves, it would have been the priests and the Levites. What they **knew in their heads** did not come out in their actions, however. What about us? Jesus said that an identifying characteristic of being a disciple is having love one toward another (John 13:35). **I John 3:17-18** "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? <sup>18</sup> My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in **deed** and in truth." Love is more than a name or title—it requires action.

### B. Love can be costly

Think about what the Good Samaritan gave in order to care for this man. It's easy to consider the clothing used to bind up the wounds, as well as the wine and oil that were poured on them. If the man was at all conscious, he would have been given water to drink that he himself may barely had enough of. Money was also given, of course, but let's not forget about his *time*. Whatever his schedule was on that particular day, he probably didn't plan on spending the time it took to care for this man's wounds...or to walk instead of ride his "beast" (probably a donkey)...or stay in an inn instead of his own bed...or have his sleep interrupted throughout the night caring for a man he didn't even know. Meeting the needs of others can be inconvenient at times; one man used the phrase "ministry can be messy."

### C. Love gives lavishly

The Good Samaritan didn't skimp in his care for this stranger; he went "above and beyond." MacArthur brought out several ways this was demonstrated. First, the "pouring" of the oil and wine on the wounds was an abundant pouring—it was generous and was more than what was necessary.

Second, the amount of money that the man prepaid the inn keeper is considerably more than we probably realize. A Roman sign board was discovered that showed the cost of one night's lodging was 1/32<sup>nd</sup> of a denarius. Two denarii, then, would be the equivalent of up to two months of lodging!

Third, the Good Samaritan opened himself up to being taken advantage of. Last part of verse 35 "Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee." A dishonest inn-keeper could have added a number of "extra charges" to the bill because the Good Samaritan gave him a "blank check," so to speak. Love gives lavishly.

Lastly, notice...

D. Opportunities to demonstrate love often come unexpectedly

As stated earlier, it was not on the Good Samaritan's itinerary for that day to find a man beaten half to death and spend the time he did to care for him. He stumbled upon the need and unlike the two "religious men" who **didn't** want to get involved, he **did** get involved.

Do we love like this? Do we recognize these opportunities as being from the Lord? Are we willing to meet needs and be inconvenienced and have it cost us something—or do we pass by on the other side because we are too busy or think we only have enough to take care of our needs and not the needs of others?

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:**

1. First and foremost, are you are saved? In order to be forgiven, we need to recognize that we have sinned against God by breaking His commandments. This man failed to see he was a law-breaker and that was the main reason Jesus told the parable. What about you? How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as the law-breaker that you **truly** are and in need of forgiveness—or do you erroneously believe you keep all of God's commandments perfectly all the time and will get to heaven because of that? You are believing a lie if you believe you are good enough to get to heaven on your own....

2. Child of God—those of us that have been born again—do you live up to your label? We know we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Are we asking God to help us do that?