

The Good Samaritan

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- [0 : 01] Dawn is breaking in Jerusalem. The traveler is gathering his belongings. He puts a few loaves, some dried fish in his bag for the journey.
- Then what is really concerning him, the precious coins that are the fruit of a very respectable few days of selling his wares. All was worth the journey to Jerusalem when the pilgrims are in town.
- He had thought of waiting a day to make the journey with friends, but he was in a hurry. Ten days away from home is a long time. And so he begins the long trek to Jericho, about 17 miles and a steep descent of some 3,000 feet to his home.
- And though the distance is maybe not that great, the journey is far from easy. It was a rocky road with lots of twists and turns and dangerous.
- But he had made the journey many times before and nothing had ever happened. All being well, he could be home by nightfall. And the very thought put a spring in his step.
- [1 : 24] Two hours on and all is well. He smiles as he imagines sitting around the table with his wife and children, recounting all the adventures of his trip to the big city.
- He also smiles as he begins to ponder on what might be the best use to be made of the coins clinking in his money bag. An extra room for the house might be a good idea as the family grows.
- Suddenly he comes around a sharp curve in the trail. And a group of bandits jump out from behind some rocks and surround him. From behind, one gives him a blow on the back of his head.
- He falls to the ground with a warm trickle of blood flowing down his back. Blows rain down on him in the midst of a chorus of profanity and vulgarity.
- And soon, in a confused state of despair mingled with relief, he loses consciousness. After a time, hard to know how long, he begins to regain consciousness.
- [2 : 37] He is clothed only by the blood that covers him. No clothes, no bag, no loaves or fish, no coins to clink.
- He tries to stand, but his body cannot respond. And the pain, the pain is searing and indescribable. He looks to the sky and sees a burning sun slowly grilling his naked body and ominously two buzzards circle menacingly overhead.
- Well, we know the story, don't we? The fate that befell the traveler in the parable of the good Samaritan. And I want to read the passage that we find in Luke's Gospel in chapter 10 and having read it then to continue considering this parable and what it teaches us this evening.
- So if you can turn with me to Luke's Gospel in chapter 10 and we'll read from verse 25 through to verse 37.
- Luke chapter 10 and verse 25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.

[3 : 59] Teacher, he asked, What must I do to inherit eternal life? What is written in the law? He replied, How do you read it? He answered, 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 love your neighbor as yourself.

You have answered correctly, Jesus replied. Do this and you will live. But he wanted to justify himself so he asked Jesus, And who is my neighbor?

In reply Jesus said, A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

A priest happened to be going down the same road and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

[5 : 07] The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. Look after him, he said. And when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.

Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? The expert in the law replied, The one who had mercy on him. Jesus told him, Go and do likewise.

The Word of God. This very well-known parable was told by Jesus in order to answer two questions. It directly and clearly answered the question that the young man or the expert in the law posed with these words, Who is my neighbor?

There in verse 29, entering into the dialogue as it has proceeded. And it is in response to this question that Jesus gives or shares this parable, Who is my neighbor?

But the parable also answers, perhaps indirectly, but crucially, the original question that the conversation had begun with. When this expert in the law approaches Jesus with this question, What must I do to inherit eternal life?

[6 : 28] And both of these questions are answered by the parable that Jesus shares. To express it in other terms, the parable presents us with the way to life, and it does so in answering the first question, What must I do to inherit eternal life?

More of that a little later. And the parable also answers the second question concerning the way of life. How are we to live? And the question of the man who is my neighbor.

And as we pick up the parable where we left it in our introduction, let's explore the challenge it poses concerning the way of life for the Christian before returning to the original question concerning the way to life.

So first of all, we will see what the parable teaches us concerning how we should live as Christians. But then we will, at the close, return to the original concern of the young man as to how we can enter into this Christian life.

How can we inherit eternal life, the way to life? What can we say about the traveler who is mentioned here in this parable?

[7 : 49] Just briefly, a comment, some about him. First of all, we can say that he was clearly a victim. He was a victim of the sins of others.

He was minding his own business. He had been doing the work that he had to do, whatever that was, in Jerusalem. He was returning to his home and the victim of unforeseen circumstances in the wrong place at the wrong time.

If he had begun his journey half an hour earlier or maybe half an hour later, he would have perhaps got home with no incident to lament. But it's just one of these things.

He was a victim of these bandits who appeared in his path. And when we think of victims and we think of the world we live in, and the city we live in, and the neighborhood we live in, or we all live in, we also are surrounded by victims of one kind or another.

Some are victims of their own sin. Others are victims of the sins of others. And perhaps most, a complex mixture of the two.

[9 : 01] We think of this neighborhood where God has placed us here in the city of Aberdeen. How many children are there within a stone's throw of this building who are denied a secure and loving home?

By the infidelity and selfishness of a mother or father or both? How many victims of abuse and neglect of one kind or another?

How many denied the most basic instruction and guidance on what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong? They've never been taught concerning these things.

And we lament their behavior and the attitudes that they have, and yet, they are victims. They have not been given the instruction that we have been privileged to receive.

And so, the lies that they live and the attitudes that they have reflect this condition in which they are in. Others are victims of a society that assured them that it was cool to get drunk and hip to try out drugs.

[10 : 02] Still others bought into the lie of safe sex and victimless promiscuity. Just live as you please and all will be well. And now, they are harvesting the bitter and painful harvest of that life that they were encouraged to live by others, pressurized to live by their peers and indeed, sadly often, by those who should have guided them in a better way.

So many victims. And of course, we live in a global village as it is sometimes called and as we cast our eyes further afield, we see so many other victims in this sin-sick world of ours.

How many who are hungry? How many victims of violence and unjust wars driven by human pride and ambition? How many who suffer curable diseases but for lack of a simple medical help or medication find themselves at death's door?

So many victims in this world in which we live. There are other kinds of victims too, not only victims of material need or social trouble or difficulties.

There are also, and this is a solemn thing, but there are also the hell-bound victims of churches without a message or without the courage to declare the message.

[11 : 35] so many looking for the living among the dead, drinking water from broken cisterns. And who will point them to Jesus?

Who will take them to the well from where springs living water? Well, as we return to the parable, we simply repeat concerning this traveler that he was a victim.

And he was a victim also with a great need, but a great need that he was incapable of meeting in his own resources. He found himself impotent in the face of his desperate circumstances.

We are told that the bandits, the robbers, left him half dead. So here he is halfway between Jerusalem and Jericho, posturate on the trail, half dead, incapable of movement, never mind securing a place of safety or proceeding to his destination where help could be at hand.

There is nothing he can do. He is in a desperate situation. He knows that he has a need, but there is nothing that he has, no resources at his disposal, that he might meet this need, that he might solve his problem.

[12 : 54] This is his condition. What more can we say concerning this traveler? Well, just one other thing that we would say, and it is not a particularly profound observation, but there is maybe a mileage in it as we would seek to learn from this for ourselves.

And that this traveler, a victim, a man with a great need and no way of meeting his need is a man with no name. We don't know the name of this man.

It is, of course, a parable that Jesus told, and so that is not surprising. And yet, as we just ponder on that, it does, I think, open a door of opportunity for us, as we would consider this parable, and as we would consider the manner which Jesus presents to us as Christians, the way of life, how we are to live, who are our neighbors, that we would put a name to this man, that we would give this man a name, and that that name would be somebody that we know, somebody who needs of our help, a man, a woman, a child, but with a name.

And so, from this nameless victim, we can transport ourselves to our world, and our situation, and consider who that man or woman or child could be, that we are called by the word to help and to reach out to in their time of need.

Who might that man or woman or child be? Could it be a child who lives in this neighborhood who could come to campaigners and learn about Jesus? And learn about the love of Jesus for them?

[14 : 27] Could it be that mother who could find friendship in little lambs as they gather in this place and are welcomed and loved and cared for? Could it be a neighbor of yours?

Could it be somebody in very evident desperate need who crosses your path? Could it be one of those foul-mouthed teenagers that we find so distasteful as we are confronted with them?

And yet who are often victims of the sins of others? I don't know who that person could be but the challenge is that we would all identify who they are.

But back to the parable. What could be done for this helpless traveler? Well the options would seem to be certainly the options that are presented to us in the parable are one of two either all for him or nothing for him.

And we are told and again the parable is so familiar we are told first of the two religious men who passed by. We read of them there in verse 31.

[15 : 34] The man is there half dead and we read a priest happened to be going down the same road and when he saw the man he passed by on the other side. So too a Levite when he came to the place and saw him passed by on the other side.

Both respond in the same way and so we can just treat them together. They were heading to Jericho also they had been in Jerusalem perhaps they had been fulfilling religious duties in the temple we don't know.

It would seem that many priests did live in Jericho. There were many hundreds of priests and many of them had duties that they could fulfill at particular seasons in the religious calendar.

They didn't need to live in Jerusalem they could simply fulfill the duties when their turn came up as it were. Well this man this priest is returning perhaps home to Jericho having fulfilled these religious duties and he finds himself confronted with this man practically a corpse as he turns around that same fateful corner.

And the Levite likewise. What would their reaction have been? How did they react? Well we can speculate we can imagine they would have been shocked. shocked. They would have been shocked at the sight. It was a repulsive sight to see a man in such a condition.

[16 : 52] They would have been disturbed. What has happened? They would have been afraid no doubt that they might be the next victim. And what do they do? Well they do nothing.

And what are their excuses? Well we're not told but again we could imagine what excuses they may have been able to generate in their own mind as they pass by on the other side.

It's too dangerous to do anything for this man. There are bandits about. We must hurry on. Maybe he's dead anyway. He seems dead. Or if he's not dead he's going to die sooner or later.

There's really nothing we can do. It wouldn't be prudent to stop by in these circumstances. We're alone. If we were part of a group, if we were traveling together, well then we would be happy to help.

But there's nothing we can do. Perhaps others will come. Others will no doubt come who are able to help this poor man but it's not something we can do. Maybe they wondered or pondered on the possibility that the man was abandoned himself.

[17 : 58] Maybe this had been a fight among thieves over the pickings of an assault and this man had lost the fight. He had brought it upon himself and so there he was lying in the condition that he was.

If he had been a godly man, if he had been a pious man, no doubt God wouldn't have allowed such a disgrace to befall him. So many excuses and yet these were men who knew their responsibilities.

These were men we can presume who knew the Word of God. They were experts in the Word of God. They knew the words of the prophet Micah that we read earlier in the service. They knew what their responsibility and their duty was.

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And these words should have come ringing to them as they saw this poor creature lying on the ground.

He has showed you, O man, what is good. You don't need to wonder what to do. You don't need to think about it. You don't need to imagine what the right thing to do is. He has showed you, O man, what is good. What does the Lord require of you to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

[19 : 09] And indeed, each of these three requirements could be applied to this particular situation and could have led them very clearly to know what they must do. Not only what they could do, but what they were required to do as those who claimed to be followers of the living and true God.

But they had so many excuses. And so their response is the response that we have already read and commented on or at least commented that they pass by on the other side.

They pass by on the other side. And what about us? What are our excuses when we are presented with a need that is uncomfortable and difficult and will take us out of the way and will demand of us that which we're not prepared to give?

We can rationalize our excuses and our reasons. I didn't do anything. It's not my fault. What could I do?

I have other responsibilities. Somebody else should help. And we can just pass by on the other side. And we can pass by on the other side in so many circumstances in our lives as Christians, as particular individuals, men and women, boys and girls with a name who need our help, but also as we think of our land and of the great needs that there are that there would be those who would stand up and speak for Jesus Christ.

[20 : 36] And what do we do? We pass by on the other side. I received a letter on Friday, I think it was, from Nicol Stephen, the MP for Aberdeen South.

And the reason I received the letter is that I've been in communication with him concerning the law that is coming before the floor of the Scottish Parliament concerning physician-assisted suicide that I mentioned on another occasion here in church.

And that law has progressed. Margo MacDonald, who is seeking to bring the law, now has secured sufficient MPs for it to be debated on the floor of Parliament.

And if things continue in this direction, then we could find ourselves at some point in the future with a headline that that law has been passed. And what do we do?

Do we wait for that headline in the Scotsman or as we look on our computer screens and we say, oh, isn't that terrible? Another God dishonoring law. Oh, isn't it terrible what's going on in this society?

[21 : 39] And yet, what right do we have to lament if we have passed by on the other side? How can we rend our clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes when we have done nothing?

And so the question is, are we passing by on the other side? Because laws of this nature will, in due course, have many victims.

Many old folks who are pressurized into doing the right thing by their family. There's such a burden on the next generation and, well, wouldn't it be just easier for all if I just ask for my life to be cut short?

There will be many victims. When we dishonor God and when we go our own way, it always ends in tears. It always ends in pain and suffering. But what do we do? Do we pass by on the other side?

We think of the children we've already mentioned who live around this neighborhood who know nothing of Jesus. What will we do? Will we pass by on the other side? Or will we seek with the wonderful resources that God has given us of a wonderful building and wonderful people that we could reach out to such and share with them something of the love of Jesus?

[22 : 53] And an opportunity is given even in the newsletter this month as we would seek to expand the work of campaigners and by all means as other ideas can be generated. Then bring them forward.

Bring them to the table. What can we do? But whatever we do, let's not pass by on the other side. When we think of many, perhaps in our own circle, who are part of broken homes and are suffering from loneliness of one kind or another, what do we do?

Do we pass by on the other side? We think of many, maybe teenage girls pregnant and crying out for love and support and being told that the only way is to kill that child.

That's the best way. That's the way you can sort out your problems. And they need somebody to turn to. They need somebody who can point them in a better way. What will we do? Will we pass by on the other side?

Well, that is what the priest did. That is what the Levite did. That's what the religious people did. But what about the Samaritan? What about the Samaritan? Well, let's just immediately go and see what the passage tells us concerning how he responded to this equally repulsive for him almost corpse that lay in his path.

[24 : 11] Well, we read there in verse 33, But a Samaritan as he traveled came where the man was. And when he saw him he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds pouring on oil and wine.

Then he put the man on his own donkey brought him to an inn and took care of him. And so the account continues. What can we say concerning the Samaritan? Well, we're told that he came where the man was.

Time doesn't allow us to go into the cultural implications of Jews and Samaritans. I think that's familiar to many of us. But let's leave that aside this evening and let's just see what he did. We're told he came to where the man was.

And I'm sure that when we're told this in the parable it's not simply saying that he came around the corner and well there was the traveler who had been assaulted. No. This is an intentional approaching of this needy man.

This is a purposeful coming towards him to know what his condition is. To understand if he is indeed dead or a lion. To turn him over and to feel his pulse and to see what can be done.

[25 : 16] He purposefully and intentionally comes to where the man was. And there's surely a great lesson for us there. We seek to serve others and yet we wait for them to come to us.

If only they would come we would welcome them. If only they would come we would be willing to help. And yet here the Samaritan doesn't wait for this man to come to him. He's incapable of coming to him.

He goes to where the man is. Yes, he had been placed in the path. God had ordered circumstances in that way but he approaches the man and he saw him and we're told he took pity on him.

He was filled with compassion for him. He had no idea of the circumstances. He had no idea if this man was an innocent victim. He had no idea who he was and yet he was filled with compassion for this complete stranger.

How difficult it is for us to know something of these sentiments. And we're told that he was not only emotionally moved and then went on his way saying a prayer but no he went to him we are told and bandaged his wounds and he was covered in the same blood that the poor traveler was covered in as he sought to clean him and to care for him pouring on oil and wine that his pain might be relieved and that he might be healed from the battering that he had received.

[26 : 45] He put him on his own donkey and took him to an inn and provided for him. His service was sacrificial and it went way beyond what we might call the ordinary call of duty.

And then we're told how even the following day when he had to continue on his way not only does he provide the funds required for the man to be cared for for perhaps one or two months depending on how we understand the values of the money mentioned but he signs a blank check as it were and he says when I come back in this direction whatever was short I'll cover it.

You might say well that wasn't very prudent that wasn't very responsible to commit yourself maybe beyond what you're able to cover but his compassion was such and his desire to help was such that he did not worry himself with such considerations.

So he came to the man he approached him that he might know him that he might know what his problem was that he might know what he could do for him and as he got to know him so he came to love him and so he was enabled to help him.

So even as we think this coming weekend as we would ponder on our call in this city and we've coined it in these words know the city love the city transform the city so let's personalize it and say that what we have here is know your neighbor love your neighbor and transform your neighbor but until we know we will not love until we love we will not transform.

[28 : 25] Well all of this in answer to the question who is my neighbor Jesus presents to this expert in the law the way of life this is how you are to live and this is the challenge for us as Christians Jesus says to us this is how you are to live this is the life that you have been called to live hence the final words that we read there in verse 37 go and do likewise this isn't just a nice story go and do likewise live as this good Samaritan lived and these words are directed to you and to me but as we come to a close I just want to consider how this parable also answers the original a question of the expert in the law what must I do to inherit eternal life this is how the conversation began and in answering this question a huge problem is created for this expert in the law a problem of quite spectacular dimensions why this man wants to know how he can inherit eternal life he wants to know how he can be right with God he wants to know how he can be saved and what Jesus has said is live like this and you will live but what's the problem the problem is that any man with an ounce of integrity and with an ounce of honesty would say but Lord

I cannot live like that I don't live like that the demand is too great it's beyond my capacity I can't commit to living like this I won't be able to and not only the man who posed the question but if there were others in the crowd listening to the parable as no doubt there were would there have been one man would there have been one woman in that crowd who could have in response to the parable have cried out to Jesus and said Jesus that man you're describing the good Samaritan that's me that's what I'm like that's what I always do as I head to Jericho I always help people who have been taken upon by bandits anybody who crosses my path I'll give them the very coat that I'm wearing could anybody have said that no nobody could have said that there was not one single individual who could have said that's me I'm okay I'll inherit eternal life this is something I can do no nobody could have responded nobody met the standard that Jesus was presenting for them the bar was too high the whole intention of the man in asking who is my neighbor was that the bar would be at a level that he could meet he could say well hopefully

Jesus will say that my neighbor are my family and those people I like and love and the in group and I can be a neighbor to them and Jesus says no it's anybody who crosses your path so why does this answer his question what must I do to inherit eternal life well it answers it in this way what Jesus says is you cannot inherit eternal life by your good works you will never be good enough you will never be this good Samaritan you will never meet the standards I require and so what the parable does is to demonstrate to the man his own incapacity to get right with God his own incapacity to earn his salvation it's simply not possible the man wanted to justify himself and what the parable does is to say you can't justify yourself because you'll never meet the great you'll never be good enough well that's a very dreary picture isn't it what is the poor man going to do he has a legitimate concern it's a healthy question it's a healthy concern he's concerned about eternity he's concerned about being right with

God and Jesus says well it's impossible yes but the reason he chose him that it's impossible is that this man would stop trying to depend on his own goodness that he would start depending on his own righteousness and he would recognize his great need of the grace of God and the forgiveness of God and only in this way would he know what it is to inherit and to be led to the way of life what what could he do this man all he could do would be to turn to the one who could forgive him trust in the one who has kept the law perfectly for him bow down before Jesus the good Samaritan in all the extension of that character this is the way to life this is the way to life that Paul demonstrates and explains to us as he writes to the Ephesians in these well known words in Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 8 to 10 what does

Paul tell us that ties in with the teaching of Jesus in the parable of the good Samaritan and what do we read but it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this not from yourselves it is the gift of God not by works not by being a good Samaritan because you'll never be that good Samaritan in the measure that God demands of you so that no one can boast for we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do having trusted in Jesus having been saved by grace through faith then we are presented with a way of life so live as the good Samaritan so serve those who cross your path not the way to life but the way of life for the Christian well for those of us who have been embraced by grace this parable presents for us for me and for you the way of life sacrificial service to all who cross our path how can we do that individually well the challenge is there for all of us to struggle with these matters but how can we do that as a congregation what does that look like to serve in that way well these are precisely the kind of questions we hope to explore and consider this weekend at the conference on urban mission that there we would be given direction as to how we can make this happen and it can go beyond a stimulating

[34 : 35] I hope sermon that can make us wonder and ponder and take it to the place of action that we might live this life this way of life that Jesus presents to us with this parable for that God would help us to respond as we ought let us pray heavenly father we come before you and we thank you