

8. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37)

The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates perfectly the principle that Christ expressed in the Golden Rule as recorded in Matt 7:12: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." This parable and the Golden Rule connect to the same one of the Ten Commandments. The fact that the expert in the law was testing shows his motive and his arrogance when he asked Jesus: "Who is my neighbor?" The prelude to the parable sets this dramatic situation.

What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?

Luke 10:25-29: 25 *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

27 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.'"

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

The dialogue began with a question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The answer to this question establishes a three-fold focus for each man. Love God, love yourself, and love your neighbor as yourself. This answer comes from two Old Testament passages combined: Duet 6:5 and Lev 19:18. Our every Christian obligation—what we must do to be saved—will fit into these three. Jesus is emphatic about the results. "Do this," he said, "and you will live." The expert in the law could not leave the question there; perhaps, because of the simplicity of the truth in the Lord's answer. "And who is my neighbor?" he asked. Jesus answered with the parable.

Who Is My Neighbor?

Luke 10:30-35: 30 *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. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 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. 35 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.'*

The bad circumstances of the man traveling happened at random. He was just going down the road of life, as it were, when misfortune fell. He was naked, beaten, and half-dead. Clearly, he was helpless before his misfortune. Coincidentally, a priest, who should have been benevolent, came along also randomly. Then a Levite came. Each one of these religious people passed by on the other side to avoid the helpless man. *Out of sight out of mind* is the modern phrase to describe such avoidance of the unfortunate. A Samaritan was the last to come, and the text says that he took pity on the man. This Samaritan went the second mile in taking care of the injured man. After he bandaged his wounds and poured oil and wine on them, he took him to an inn and took care of him. The Samaritan even arranged for his continuing care.

Implicit in all the scriptures telling us to take care of people is the responsibility of empathetic involvement. In James 1:27, the command to visit the widows and orphans carries the idea of visiting to take care of: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." The daily application of the religion of Christ is in these acceptable, pure, faultless acts. The meaning of our neighborliness extends to all men in Gal 6:10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

In one of our future parables, Christ relates to us that if we care for the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, and the stranger, we care for him:

37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" Matt 25:37-40.

The priest and Levite could have avoided the man because he was a Samaritan, a race to be shunned by the Jews; or they could have avoided the man because they did not want to be bothered. Today, we must serve men of low and high estate in their time of need. We must also serve them when it is convenient or inconvenient to our personal circumstances. If we serve only those whom we like, we have our reward. Jesus taught in Matt 5:46-48, "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Which of the Three Was a Neighbor?

Lk 10:36-37: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

The expert in the law understood the parable, as certainly we understand it. Just understanding the teaching does not make us a good neighbor. As the expert was told, we must "go and do likewise." Doing becomes fundamental to being. In James 2:14-17, James bases our faith on works that we do:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

The Lord's teaching reinforces this command to doers of the word in Matt 7:21-22: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Conclusion

The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches how Christians ought to act as neighbors to one another and as neighbors to those that we do not even know. This "good neighbor" teaching is rooted in the law of Moses; and by Christ's reiteration, it becomes an eternal part of the law of God for us today: "'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.'" Luke 10:27; Duet 6:5; Lev 19:18.

Study Questions

1. In what way did the legal expert test the Lord? _____
2. Why did the priest and Levite avoid the man? _____
3. What does the word *visit* imply? _____
4. When is faith dead? _____
5. What must we do beyond saying, "Lord, Lord?" _____
6. Who is your neighbor? _____
7. Who should we love in addition to our neighbor? _____