

Neighbors: Imitating the Lord (10:25-37)

It was expected that rabbis would discuss theological matters in public, and the question this scribe (lawyer) asked was one that was often debated by the Jews. It was a good question asked with a bad motive, because the lawyer hoped to trap our Lord. However, Jesus trapped the lawyer!

Our Lord sent the man back to the law, not because the law saves us (Gal. 2:16, 21; 3:21), but because the law shows us that we need to be saved. There can be no real conversion without conviction, and the law is what God uses to convict sinners (Rom. 3:20).

The scribe gave the right answer, but he would not apply it personally to himself and admit his own lack of love for both God and his neighbor. So, instead of *being justified* by throwing himself on the mercy of God (Luke 18:9-14), he tried to *justify himself* and wriggle out of his predicament. He used the old debating tactic: "Define your terms! What do you mean by 'neighbor'? Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus did not say that this story was a parable, so it could well be the report of an actual occurrence. For Jesus to tell a story that made the Jews look bad and the Samaritans look good would either be dangerous or self-defeating. "You just made that up!" they could say. "We all know that nothing like that would ever happen!" So it is possible that some of His listeners, including the lawyer, knew that such a thing had really happened. Either way, the account is realistic.

The worst thing we can do with any parable, especially this one, is turn it into an allegory and make everything stand for something. The victim becomes the lost sinner who is half-dead (alive physically, dead spiritually), helplessly left on the road of life. The priest and Levite represent the law and the sacrifices, neither of which can save the sinner.

The Samaritan is Jesus Christ who saves the man, pays the bill, and promises to come again. The inn stands for the local church where believers are cared for, and the "two pence" are the two ordinances, baptism and Communion. If you take this approach to Scripture, you can make the Bible say almost anything you please, and you are sure to miss the messages God wants you to get.

The road from Jerusalem down to Jericho was indeed a dangerous one. Since the temple workers used it so much, you would have

cast him into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10), but God's people can today claim Christ's Calvary victory by faith (Col. 2:15).

But the enemy will not give up! Satan would certainly attack Christ's servants and seek to destroy them. That is why our Lord added the words of encouragement in Luke 10:19. He assured them that their authority was not gone now that the preaching mission had ended, and that they could safely tread on the "old serpent" without fear (Gen. 3:15; Rev. 12:9).

The Lord cautioned them not to "go on rejoicing" over their victories but to rejoice because their names had been written in heaven. (The verb means "they have been written and they stand written." It is a statement of assurance. See Phil. 4:3; Rev. 20:12-15.) As wonderful as their miracles were, the greatest miracle of all is still the salvation of a lost soul. The Greek word translated "written" means "to inscribe formally and solemnly." It was used for the signing of a will, a marriage document, or a peace treaty, and also for the enrolling of a citizen. The perfect tense in the Greek means "it stands written."

But our highest joy is not found in service or even in our salvation, but in being submitted to the sovereign will of the heavenly Father, for this is the foundation for both service and salvation. Here we see God the Son rejoicing through God the Holy Spirit because of the will of God the Father! "I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Ps. 40:8).

Jesus was not rejoicing because sinners were blind to God's truth, for God is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9). He rejoiced because *the understanding of that truth* did not depend on natural abilities or education. If that were the case, most of the people in the world would be shut out of the kingdom. When the Twelve and the Seventy were preaching, they did not see the "wise and learned" humbling themselves to receive God's truth and grace, but they saw the "common people" trusting the Word (Luke 7:29-30; 1 Cor. 1:26-29). In His sovereign will, God has ordained that sinners must humble themselves before they can be lifted up (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:6).

Christ's ambassadors were indeed privileged people. They were able to see and hear things that the greatest saints in the Old Testament ages yearned to see and hear but could not. The Messiah was at work, and they were a part of His work!

thought the Jews or Romans would have taken steps to make it safe. It is much easier to maintain a religious system than it is to improve the neighborhood.

Most of us can think up excuses for the priest and Levite as they ignored the victim. (Maybe we have used them ourselves!) The priest had been serving God at the temple all week and was anxious to get home. Perhaps the bandits were still lurking in the vicinity and using the victim as "bait." Why take a chance? Anyway, it was not his fault that the man was attacked. The road was busy, so somebody else was bound to come along and help the man. The priest left it to the Levite, and then the Levite did what the priest did—nothing! Such is the power of the bad example of a religious man.

By using a Samaritan as the hero, Jesus disarmed the Jews, for the Jews and Samaritans were enemies (John 4:9; 8:48). It was not a Jew helping a Samaritan but a Samaritan helping a Jew *who had been ignored by his fellow Jews!* The Samaritan loved those who hated him, risked his own life, spent his own money (two days' wages for a laborer), and was never publicly rewarded or honored as far as we know.

What the Samaritan did helps us better understand what it means to "show mercy" (Luke 10:37), and it also illustrates the ministry of Jesus Christ. The Samaritan identified with the needs of the stranger and had compassion on him. There was no logical reason why he should rearrange his plans and spend his money just to help an "enemy" in need, but mercy does not need reasons. Being an expert in the law, the scribe certainly knew that God required His people to show mercy, even to strangers and enemies (Ex. 23:4-5; Lev. 19:33-34; Mic. 6:8).

See how wisely Jesus "turned the tables" on the lawyer. Trying to evade responsibility, the man asked, "Who is my neighbor?" But Jesus asked, "Which of these three men was neighbor to the victim?" The big question is, "To whom can I be a neighbor?" and this has nothing to do with geography, citizenship, or race. Wherever people need us, there we can be neighbors and, like Jesus Christ, show mercy.

The lawyer wanted to discuss "neighbor" in a general way, but Jesus forced him to consider a specific man in need. How easy it is for us to talk about abstract ideals and fail to help solve concrete problems. We can discuss things like "poverty" and "job opportunities"

and yet never personally help feed a hungry family or help somebody find a job.

Of course, the lawyer wanted to make the issue somewhat complex and philosophical, but Jesus made it simple and practical. He moved it from *duty* to *love*, from *debating* to *doing*. To be sure, our Lord was not condemning discussions or debates; He was only warning us not to use these things as excuses for doing nothing. Committees are not always committed!

One of my favorite D. L. Moody stories illustrates this point. Attending a convention in Indianapolis, Mr. Moody asked singer Ira Sankey to meet him at six o'clock one evening at a certain street corner. When Sankey arrived, Mr. Moody put him on a box and asked him to sing, and it was not long before a crowd gathered. Moody spoke briefly, inviting the crowd to follow him to the nearby opera house. Before long, the auditorium was filled, and the evangelist preached the gospel to the spiritually hungry people.

When the delegates to the convention started to arrive, Moody stopped preaching and said, "Now we must close as the brethren of the convention wish to come and to discuss the question, 'How to Reach the Masses.'" *Touché!*

We may read this passage and think only of "the high cost of caring," but it is far more costly *not* to care. The priest and the Levite lost far more by their neglect than the Samaritan did by his concern. They lost the opportunity to become better men and good stewards of what God had given them. They could have been a good influence in a bad world, but they chose to be a bad influence. *The Samaritan's one deed of mercy has inspired sacrificial ministry all over the world.* Never say that such ministry is wasted! God sees to it that no act of loving service in Christ's name is ever lost.

It all depends on your outlook. To the thieves, this traveling Jew was a victim to exploit, so they attacked him. To the priest and Levite, he was a nuisance to avoid, so they ignored him. But to the Samaritan, he was a neighbor to love and help, so he took care of him. What Jesus said to the lawyer, He says to us: "Go and *keep on doing it likewise*" (literal translation).

Worshippers: Listening to the Lord (10:38-42)

Worship is at the heart of all that we are and all that we do in the Christian life. It is impor-