

# Parables of Jesus

Message 2

## *Jesus the Good Samaritan*

Luke 10:25-37

### *The Good Samaritan*

This is the simple story of a man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. Travel was dangerous in the ancient world, especially on the edges of the Roman Empire, and thieves were common. This unfortunate man was attacked, beaten, and robbed by a gang of thieves who did the job so thoroughly that he almost appeared dead. In other words, he looked really gruesome. Too battered to move, he suffered under the heat of the sun, the flies buzzing over him, feasting on the juicy tidbits of his flesh. He most certainly *would* die if he did not get some help soon. But good news! He hears a priest walking up the road. What a relief! This religious man will rescue him from the heat, insects, and certain death. But joy turns to disappointment as the priest sees the wretch, hastens to the opposite side of the road, and quickly rushes on. Again, the man is left to contemplate a slow, agonizing death. But wait! It is too good to be true. Another man is coming down the road. And he is a Levite, someone who assists in the Temple services. Surely this pious individual will take care of him. But the steps pause, then scuffle to the other side of the road as the Levite also flees this ugly scene. Despair sets in as the man realizes that he will die. If the best of the Jews – a priest and a Levite – refuse to help him, surely no one will. Finally, however, someone coming up the road stops at his side. He takes stock of the situation, cleans the dirt out of the wounds, anoints and bandages them, and begins to pick up the man. But now despair of the injured man turns to panic – for he was being touched by a Samaritan!

Have you ever been assisted by someone you couldn't stand? Maybe in elementary school you needed one more player on your baseball team, and Orville, the class idiot volunteered to fill out the roster. Or you needed a date to the prom and Seymour, the class nerd was the only one to ask you out. What anguish is more exquisite than that of being helped by someone you hate?

It is hard for us to grasp the dynamics of this situation, because there is no group in America today that evokes the visceral hatred of a majority group that comes from generations of animosity. Perhaps the closest thing is black-white relations until recently. In Roman Palestine, however, the Jews and the Samaritans passionately hated each other. The root cause was ethnic and religious. After Solomon's reign, Israel was split into two kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. Several hundred years later the Northern Kingdom grew so wicked, God called in the Assyrians to destroy it. Assyrian foreign policy was to displace all the nations they conquered. By thus splitting them up, the Assyrians hoped to prevent them from organizing for rebellion. So the northern Israelite were shipped out to other countries and other nationalities were brought into the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Before long these peoples all intermarried, so whatever Jews remained became half-breeds. To make matters worse, they insisted on worshipping God at their own temple on Mt. Gerizim instead of the official temple in Jerusalem. Now, this was a legitimate issue. God clearly, explicitly, and repeatedly warned the Israelites not to worship anywhere but at the one temple. The Samaritans were wrong on this point.

But is that a sufficient cause for hatred spanning dozens of generations? The feeling was so deep that when the Jews traveled from Galilee in the north to Judea in the south, they traveled far out of their way to avoid Samaria. That would be like traveling from Pennsylvania to Virginia via Ohio because you can't bear the thought of encountering a Marylander! And now here is a good Jew being rescued, even touched, by a filthy Samaritan. What a disgrace! What a humiliation! Let's hope this never gets back home.

Can you put yourself into this story? What would be an equivalent situation for you? If an arrogant, obnoxious, classmate rescued you from failure by showing you how to do a major program? If you had no

roommate and were invited to join someone who smells and dumps food all over the place? Some rescues can seem worse than the problem, can't they?

Well, the Samaritan did a thorough job. He took the man to the nearest inn so he could recuperate in comfort. He even paid the innkeeper to nurse the man back to health and promised to cover all charges. Why did he do all this? He could easily have passed by. At least, the priest and the Levite found it easy to pass by. Why did he help a man his people hated? The text tells us. It says in verse 33 that he had compassion on the man. Compassion is a deep and profound response. It goes beyond pity. The word originated from the words for "with" and "suffering", and carries the sense of "suffering with" the person in distress. Somehow, the Samaritan understood the pain of the man who had been robbed. Perhaps previously the Samaritan had himself been robbed and abandoned. However he came by it, the Samaritan felt the pain of the man and was moved to act. In so doing he clearly was a neighbor to the man who had been robbed.

Now here is a great irony. The Samaritan understood what to do because he had compassion on the injured man. But the Jews had no compassion, even though he was one of their own people. Here the Samaritan, the half-breed heretic, is outdoing the Jews in keeping the law, for Moses specifically instructed the Jews to have compassion on non-Jews. In Leviticus 19:33-34 we read,

And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God

This is a strong statement. The word "stranger" means sojourner, resident alien, long-term visitor. It is a non-Jew living in Israel – like the Samaritans! God begins by instructing the Israelites not to mistreat the stranger. But He amplifies this command several orders of magnitude by adding the positive command to treat him as "one born among you" – i.e. like a brother. Even more, they are to love him as themselves. Who ever heard of treating immigrants as well as yourself? God explains why He gave this law – the Israelites themselves had been aliens in Egypt. If you remember, they were at first treated very well, then later they were enslaved and harshly mistreated by the Egyptians. God finally delivered them, but He had to kill the entire Egyptian army to do so. The Israelites should have known how wonderful it was to be treated well, and how awful it was to be mistreated when in a foreign land. Essentially, God is expecting compassion of them. Having been foreigners themselves, they should know how foreigners might feel and treat them with corresponding understanding.

### ***Good Samaritans Today***

Just think what this world would be like if we all acted this way. Suppose the Germans had not mistreated the Jews, and the Serbs treated the Kosovars like brothers, and the Hutus loved the Tutsis as themselves. How much easier to rebuild Afghanistan if the Pashtuns and the Tajiks could get along. What would America be like if we all had compassion on each other? I know one thing – we would have far fewer lawyers! As you look around at the problems in our world, isn't it obvious that most of them would be solved if we simply followed the principle of this parable? Peace would break out all over the globe if all people began to look on their neighbors with compassion instead of suspicion and hatred. But we don't naturally do this. Never in all of human history has mankind consistently treated others well – especially others who are very different. Man just doesn't have it in him to do so. Isn't it obvious that only God can do what philosophers, diplomats and generals have failed to do – to enable us to live at peace with one another? It's clear, isn't it, that we need God just as much in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as we did in all the preceding centuries.

Now we can get to the devastating pointedness of the parable. The righteous lawyer did not ask these questions in a search for truth or out of love for God. He was seeking to justify himself. In other words, he was looking for Jesus to support his opinion that he deserved eternal life. He thought he had it

made. He was scrupulous in his obedience to the law. He claimed to love God with all his heart. No doubt he treated his next-door neighbors quite well. He kept the feasts and offered all the sacrifices. He came to Jesus just so Jesus would certify that he really was better than everyone else and was definitely going to heaven.

The trouble is, by the end of the parable, it is clear that this lawyer is doomed. He had to admit that the Samaritan had acted as a neighbor, but no one dared say the obvious – that the lawyer hated the Samaritan. The lawyer broke the command to love the stranger in your land. Thus he was no neighbor, thus he did not keep the second greatest command, and thus he had no hope of eternal life.

Now let's apply this parable to us here tonight. Where do you fit in this parable? Are you the Samaritan? Or are you the religious hypocrite? Do you have compassion on others, or do you avoid the needy? You are not likely to encounter physically beat up people on the Lehigh campus, but you will certainly encounter socially and emotionally beat up people here. How do you respond to the guy who tries to drown his emptiness in alcohol and pukes all over his bed? How do you react to the girl searching for love who got drunk and can't remember if she had sex with her date? Do you think, "What a fool! He got what he deserves for getting drunk." "How idiotic! She should have known that would happen sooner or later." Do you go over to your friend's place to enjoy some good company, away from the smells and the sobs of the injured? Or are you there for this poor girl, and do you stick with the sick guy? Do you walk to the other side of the road when you see someone caught in a disgusting situation? Or do you comfort the distraught and help clean up the sick? Do you hate all half-breed heretics here, too? Are you neighbor to no one, or do you have compassion on the hurting?

### ***Jesus the Great Neighbor***

In order to have compassion, you must see that you also are the man robbed and left for dead. You entered this world an alien to God's Kingdom. You were a visitor in a land not your own. You foolishly followed the path to destruction, and you became ruined by sin. You were disgusting and repulsive in God's sight. His holy eyes dared not look upon the filthiness of sinful you.

The lawyer had it all wrong. He thought that by scrupulously keeping the law he would earn eternal life. Failing to see his own neediness, he was blind to the help Jesus provides. He did not see that only Jesus has eternal life, and only gives it to those who need Him. If you are the man half-dead and offensive to God, Jesus will heal your wounds and give you eternal life. But if you are satisfied with yourself and come to Jesus only to hear him say you are better than others, you also are doomed.

The apostle Paul concluded his treatise on man's moral condition by quoting from the scripture. In Romans 3:10-18 we read,

"There is none righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. <sup>12</sup> They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." <sup>13</sup> "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; <sup>14</sup> "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." <sup>15</sup> "Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup> Destruction and misery are in their ways; <sup>17</sup> And the way of peace they have not known." <sup>18</sup> "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Romans 3:10-18

By ourselves we all are spiritually impotent – like the half-dead man. But we actually are even worse than impotent – we all are naturally hostile toward God. On our own we resent God for intruding into our affairs and hate Him for restricting us. On our own, we had no hope of surviving God's judgment.

But here is the gospel! God has had compassion on you. He has sent Jesus along your path. Jesus has not passed you by, but has stopped to heal your wounds, bring you into His Father's house – even make you a full citizen of His Father's Kingdom. And best of all, He pays for everything. Jesus is your great Neighbor who has come to rescue you from ruin and make you a true son or daughter of God.

The disturbing part of this story is that Jesus is not who you want Him to be. Like the Samaritan, Jesus offends us. He is from a different world and claims allegiance to Himself. We wish He would heal us and then get on down the road, but no, He requires a life-long relationship with us. And as we go, He deeply annoys us by exposing our sin and calling us to holy living. But think of the benefit of following Him – peace, hope, love, and eternal life. Where else can you find this medicine for your soul? Nowhere. Only Jesus can heal you.

If you have never before asked Jesus to heal you of your evil heart, ask Him now to clean off your sin and make you acceptable to God. Embrace the divine stranger who freely gives you all you long for in this life – and in the next. If have already believed in Jesus, then follow His example. In gratitude to Christ and compassion for fellow man, you go out and rescue the hurting in your dorm and classroom. You be a true neighbor to others at Lehigh.

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August 31, 2004