

## Sermon 10 July 2022 The Good Samaritan

### Luke 10:25-37

The Parable of the Good Samaritan has to be one of the greatest short stories ever told. On the face of it, it has a very simple message – it is our duty to care for anyone in need, no matter whom they might be. But at the same time, as with so many of the stories Jesus told, it has many layers containing a variety of messages. It would take more than a 10 minute sermon to do justice to all these layers, so I will look at just a few.

Firstly, let's have a look at the scene. A traveller was making his way from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was set upon by robbers, beaten, robbed and left for dead. This particular stretch of road was notoriously dangerous. It was very windy, so you didn't have a clear view of the road ahead, and in addition, large rocks were dotted along the roadside, providing ideal hiding places for those who had villainous intents.

A letter dated AD 171 complains to local authorities about the crime being committed along the road. There are historical records of travellers who paid protection money to local thugs to insure safe passage over the road. We have to ask ourselves what this man, and indeed all the participants in this story, were doing travelling down this road on their own, but let's not spoil the story. The point is, they were.

So this man is left lying there, to all intents and purposes dead and along comes a priest. The priest carefully avoids him by crossing on to the other side of the road and moving on. There is probably a reason why he did this, whether it is a good one or not is debatable. Priests served in the Temple in Jerusalem and many of them lived in Jericho. As stated in Numbers 19:11, touching a dead person would make him unceremoniously unclean for 7 days and would entail him returning to Jerusalem and undergoing a rigorous cleansing ritual. So he was playing it safe by avoiding him completely.

The next person who came along is a Levite. The Levite assisted in the Temple. The law with regards touching a dead person would not have strictly applied to him but there is certainly a sense of guilt by association, so to speak.

I can't help feeling that Jesus was, once again, having a real dig at the Pharisees here. Jesus often criticised the Pharisees. The Pharisees were a religious party who had huge influence. They controlled the synagogues and they believed the way to God was through obeying the law, which in itself was quite elaborate. This is what Jesus took issue with. He said they had it all wrong; that God was not interested in rituals and regulations, that the way to God was through love. The actions of the priest and the Levite were all about observing ritual rather than extending a little TLC to the poor victim. 2,000 years later, as I look at various domains of our worldwide church, I do wonder if we have really understood this message from Jesus.

And now we come to the man of the moment, the Samaritan. To understand the full ramification of this story, we need to understand the relationship between Jews and the Samaritans. To put it simply, the Samaritans were the enemies of the Jews, and remember the victim was Jewish. The animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans was deeply entrenched. This story is called the Good Samaritan, but to first-century Jews there was no such thing. One notable Rabbi went so far as to label Samaritans as 'degenerate'. And the feeling was mutual. For their part, the Samaritans returned the hostility in good measure.

So we can just see what a powerful and revolutionary point Jesus is making. Remember Jesus is telling this story in response to the question, 'Who is my neighbour?' Now to the Jewish man of that time, their neighbour would be restricted to their fellow Jew and certainly not include a Gentile (non-Jew). Some Rabbis went so far as to say that it was wrong to assist a Gentile woman at childbirth because that was just bringing another Gentile into the world!

But Jesus is giving a whole new perspective on just who our neighbour is, and just as importantly, how we should treat them. Bottom line, we care for anyone and everyone, no matter what our relationship might be with them. This was revolutionary, but that was Jesus. He gave the norms and standards of the day a real shake-up.

I want to share with you the experience of a woman who was standing on a street corner, waiting for the light to turn green so she could cross the street. Directly across from her on the other side of the street, waiting also for the light to turn green, was a girl of about 17. The woman couldn't help but notice that the girl was crying. For a moment their eyes met. It was only a fleeting glance, but it was enough for the woman to see the pain in her face. Then the girl looked away.

Then the light turned green and each stepped off the curb and started across the street. As they were about to meet, every part of the woman wanted to reach out to the girl and comfort her. But the woman passed her by. She didn't even greet her; just passed her by.

For a long time afterwards, the pain-filled eyes of that girl haunted the woman. Over and over she said to herself, 'Why didn't I say something to her? Why didn't I offer some comfort? But I didn't. I just walked on by.'

I am sure we can all think of an occasion when we have felt something similar. I know I certainly can, on more occasions than I would care to acknowledge.

I want to finish by making two points. Firstly, as well as the question as to who constitutes our neighbour, this parable also addresses the question as to what constitutes love as prescribed by Jesus. The answer is that love is not an emotional feeling but rather a gesture that entails a degree of sacrifice. The Samaritan not only put himself at some risk by his actions, he also put the victim up at an inn and promised to return and remunerate the

innkeeper if there was a shortfall. This really does lie at the heart of Christian love. The love is embodied in the sacrifice. The two are inextricably entwined.

The other point I want to make is that the Samaritan was a hero, and the label 'Samaritan' carries a sense of heroism. So who and what is a hero?

*Show pictures of heroes and ask to identify*

Now you might be thinking, 'Yes, but I can never be like those people.' Well, let me say this – you might not be a Jonah Lomu or a Mother Teresa, but one of the definitions of a hero is 'a person who is admired for their noble qualities.' I am going to show you a picture of a hero.

*Hold up mirror*

The point is this – the Good Samaritan was a very normal person just like you and me, but through his caring actions, he was very much a hero. You can all be heroes, every one of you. You can make a difference in someone's life, and that means you a hero.

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