
Intro. One day as Jesus was teaching, a certain expert in the law of Moses stood up to ask Jesus a question. He did not ask the question as a sincere seeker of truth, but to test Jesus, hoping to gain an opportunity to accuse Jesus of giving an answer contrary to the law of Moses. So he asked him in the last of v.25, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Could there be a greater question than that question? Isn’t that a question you should be interested in this morning? After all, you’re not going to live forever, & you could die at any time. The question is, “How can I go to heaven when I die?” Many want to know the answer to that question. Jesus responded by asking the lawyer to answer his own question. The lawyer then summarized the Law by quoting from the two most important commandments of the Law—Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18. We see these verses quoted in v.27, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,” and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’” Thus, the lawyer assumed that by keeping these two laws, he would keep the whole Law & gain eternal life. Jesus affirmed in v.28 that if indeed he fully kept those commandments, he would live forever.

The lawyer felt pretty good about himself at this point. He felt he truly did love God with all his heart. He believed he had a love for his Jewish brothers. No doubt he even gave alms to poor Jews. But he knew that his love ended there. So v.29 says that he wanted to justify himself. Isn’t that typical behavior? We are prone to criticize others, but we are just as prone to justify ourselves! This lawyer was hoping that Jesus would give sanction to his belief that the commandment to love your neighbor was restricted to his Jewish brethren. He understood that “neighbor” meant more than the people living next door, but how much more? So with great wisdom Christ answered that question with a heart-touching story that has endured for almost 2,000 years. This story is going to answer the question, “Who is my neighbor” in an unexpected way. So I want to explain the meaning of the story and motivate us all by this story.

Now first of all, I want us to see from our text the fact that:

I. SOMETIMES WE FAIL TO SHOW LOVE

That’s the very point Jesus wants to drive home to this lawyer’s conscience. Let me give you the background to this story. As this certain man traveled from Jerusalem to Jericho, he would travel about 17 miles on a road that descends more than 3,000 feet. It is rugged and rocky, dangerous for traveling, skirted by many a cave or hollow, facilitating a surprise attack by robbers and other criminals. So with that background in mind, let’s see from our story three examples of a failure to show love. First:

A. The Robbers Failed to Show Love – In v.30 Jesus says, “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.” When this man fell among the robbers, escape was impossible, for, according to the Greek original, the robbers surrounded him. So in their actions we see a terrible violation of the command of God to love your neighbor as yourself.
Furthermore, these men violated the 8th Commandment, “Thou shalt not steal” (Ex. 20:15, KJV). If he was riding on a donkey, they took that. If he had any money on him, they took that. Yet the only thing we know for sure that they stole from him was his clothing. Clothing was valuable in that day. Not only did they steal from him, but they also wounded him with blow upon blow, until he was almost dead. He probably would have died had it not been for the compassion of one traveler.

This kind of violence is still going on today. I’m sure you are aware of the fact that we are living in a dangerous world. Danger stalks us on the highways, & on the streets of certain neighborhoods. Danger meets us in the parking lots and in the shopping centers. In some areas of the country it is as bad or worse than what we read about here. For years now we have been hearing reports about how bad things are in Mexico, & such violence is spilling over our border into our country.

That illustrates to us the attitude that some people have toward other people in the world. There are some people who abuse other people. This is the philosophy of the rapist, the robber, the crooked businessman, and the child abuser. This is the philosophy of all of those who take advantage of others. Their philosophy is: What’s yours is mine and I’ll take it. We are living in a society that has become dehumanized and we have a generation of people who have been brought up to believe that human life is not worth a very great deal. So, they look on other people not as people to be loved and helped, but rather as things to be used and abused. They are out there everywhere.

So by this time in our story Jesus has their interest. Everybody is at attention because danger and abuse and victimization is something we are all familiar with. They are leaning forward with interest to hear more of the story.

Now you may feel pretty good that you are not as bad as the thieves and robbers that we have read about. Perhaps no one here today has violated the commandment not to steal to the point that you even used violence to do so. But there are other ways in which this command to love can be violated, and so consider with me the next two examples of a failure to love:

B. The Priest Failed to Show Love – Jesus says in v.31, “Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.” What is surprising is that the priest failed to show love. He had recently been engaged in sacred temple activities for a week. He was now very likely on his way home.

Now when he came upon this wounded man, notice what he did. He moved to the other side of the road. The robbers abused their neighbor, but the priest avoided his neighbor in his time of need. Now why didn’t he not stop and render aid? After all, showing mercy to those in need is one of the most basic and imperative requirements of the Law of God. But I’m sure he justified his lack of help with good excuses. He could have feared that he would be the next victim. After all, he was a valuable clergyman. It seemed in everyone’s best interest to hurry home and avoid a similar fate. Furthermore, Jewish law stated that to touch a dead man resulted in defilement, & perhaps he wanted to avoid defilement if it turned out he was dead (Lev. 21:1). Or he could have thought, “I have been away from my family for a whole week. I need to put my family first and get on home.” But the truth of the matter is he simply did not want to give up his time, effort, and money to help him. He was only concerned about himself. The robbers said, “What is yours is now mine.” The priest said, “What is mine is mine, and I’ll keep it.” He probably had offered sacrifices for others in the temple, but he was not willing to make any sacrifices himself.
What about us? What kind of excuses will we offer for not helping someone in need? These days we have more excuses. Some people are afraid of being sued if they help someone, & the person dies! There is a Good Samaritan law in Virginia (Section 8.01-225), so you shouldn’t worry about that. Would you be like the priest & avoid helping someone in need?

C. The Levite Failed to Show Love – Jesus said in v.32, “Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.” The office or duty of the Levites was to render assistance to the priests in their services. We could think of him as being like a Baptist deacon. Or you might think of him as a Minister of Music, since some of the Levites conducted the sacred music of the temple service. He, too, would have been returning from service in the temple. He seemed to be more interested in the poor, wounded victim, for we are told that he "came and looked on him," but again we read that he "passed by on the other side." So the preacher failed to show love, but the deacon or Music Minister didn’t do any better! Even religious leaders did nothing to help this poor man.

Now these aren’t bad guys. They were not thieves & robbers. There viewed themselves as good guys, & others did as well. They had taken a week off from their other duties, and they were just in a hurry to get back home. They were just too busy to help. There are a lot of people who aren’t bad, but they’re busy. They have a lot going on. How often have we failed to help someone in need because we are just too busy, and we don’t want to get involved?

Now in both cases they were returning from worship and service in the temple, and yet, it did not seem to affect their lives. They were religious, but not very loving. We ought to ask ourselves: what happens when we go to church? We sing these wonderful songs together. We study the Word of God together, we worship together. Does going to church affect how you live? Or is church-going just an outward ritual for you? Does anything take place in our hearts that changes our attitude and our outlook toward other people? If not, there is something wrong with our worship!

By the way, we see here an example of the providential care of God. What better thing could the Lord Himself do for the poor half dead man than to bring some man to help him? It says in v.31 that the priest passed that way “by chance” (sugkuria). That was speaking from man’s viewpoint. But when a soul is in need, God often sends someone their way in His providence. There have been a number of times when I have needed help on the highway, and I have been impressed with the way the Lord has sent someone my way to help out. One time we were returning from the Southern Baptist Convention and my rear tire blew out. Of all the people who could have stopped to render aid, guess who did stop? It was a Baptist deacon & his wife! God brought the Priest and the Levite to this needy man, but they willfully refused the sacred duty which providence demanded of them.

So what we see here are three examples of a failure to love one’s neighbor. They violated the greatest commandment of God in reference to our fellow man. When was the last time you failed to show love to someone in need? If we violate any of the commands of God, let us make sure we do not violate the greatest!

So what does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself? Jesus answers that question by giving:
II. AN EXAMPLE OF LOVING ONE’S NEIGHBOR

At this point in the story the lawyer is not surprised at the failure of the Priest & Levite. He was not a priest, & probably not a Levite. He & the others in the audience may have expected the story to take an anti-clerical twist, that an Israelite layman would be the one to show love. But instead, Jesus says in v.33, “But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was….” What is he going to do? The Jews despised the mixed-breed Samaritans, and he may have assumed that he would treat him as an enemy, & abuse that poor Jew even further. He certainly did not expect the Samaritan to offer aid. But instead, he is the only one who becomes a noble example of love. Thus, Jesus exposes the lawyer’s own prejudice & hatred. If the victim had been a Samaritan, would he have helped him? Absolutely not!

Now the Samaritan illustrates four characteristics of love that that should be true of our love. First of all:

A. We Should Have an Inclusive Love – As already noted, we see that neighborly love came from an unexpected source: a Samaritan! The Jews normally had no dealings with the Samaritans (John 4:9), & I would imagine that such an attitude was normally reciprocated. Yet here the Samaritan did not ask the victim regarding his nationality before he would help him. Instead, he overcame all the usual hostilities and saw in the wounded man a neighbor who needed aid. Literally, the word “neighbor” refers to someone nearby. So according to this story, we have a clear obligation to all people, especially the ones that we come in contact with. We must not limit our love to family members, and members of our own church. If we are going to be as loving as we ought to be, we must also show love to anyone who has a need that we come in contact with, regardless of race or ethnic background.

I think immigrants should come into our country legally. Yet if I see someone in serious need who appears to be an immigrant, I am not to ask for proof of citizenship, or proof of legal status, before I help them! If you and I come into contact with someone in need, we are not to pass them by based on their race or ethnic background.

In essence Christ has turned the question from “Who is my neighbor?” to “Whose neighbor am I?” We all need neighbors. When someone has a need, and God causes your path to cross with his, will you be a neighbor to him?

B. We Should Have a Compassionate Love – Jesus says in the last of v.33, “And when he saw him, he had compassion.” The sight of the wounded man caused the Samaritan to have compassion, unlike the priest who didn’t even want to get a good look at the suffering man. The Levite saw his wounds, & depth of suffering, but did not allow his heart to be moved with compassion. 1 John 3:17 says, “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

We should especially have compassion for those who suffer like this man, through no fault of their own. Think of all the children that are suffering because mom and/or dad are hooked on drugs or alcohol! We’re in a city where there are thousands of lost people and they are going to die and they are going to spend somewhere in eternity. Do you have any compassion? Is your heart moved for those people? We should have a compassionate love. God gave us compassion to motivate us to show love to those in need.
In this story we see that we should have compassion for those who are injured & need help. We should have compassion for those who are victims of crime. We should also have compassion on those who are sick. When was the last time you ministered to the sick?

C. We Should Have an Active Love – Too often our expressions of love are just words, and perhaps feelings. But the Samaritan had the kind of love that moved him to action. Jesus says in v.34, “So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.” First, he gave attention to his wounds. He washed his wounds with wine. Its alcoholic content served as a disinfectant. Then he applied soothing olive oil. Then he bandaged his wounds. He did not stop there. He put him on his own donkey, and walked, leading him to the nearest inn. The Samaritan did not regard his duty as done when he had brought the man to shelter. He continued to look after him, perhaps keeping a vigil all through the night.

This is the way love should be shown. 1 John 3:18 says, “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” Love must be practical & active, and should not merely consist of words or feeling sorry.

D. We Should Have a Sacrificial Love – We have already seen an example of this from v.34. He sacrificed his own oil & wine. He sacrificed the comfort of riding on his own donkey. He probably sacrificed a good night’s sleep as he cared for him through the night. Then we read more about his sacrifice in v.35, “On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’” He sacrificed 2 denarii for the wounded man. That was equal to 2 day’s wages. And if the care cost more than that, he was willing to pay the difference!

In John 3:16 we see that the love of God involved sacrifice. He loved us so much He was even willing to sacrifice His Son. Love always costs you something.

Do you have the kind of love that will cause you to give to our World Hunger offering in October, to help those in need? Will you give to our Benevolence offering next Sunday, or give food or money to the Whelan family? True love will cause us to make sacrifices for those in need.

III. LESSONS FROM THIS STORY

A. A Lesson Concerning Salvation - The initial question that led to this story was not “Who is my neighbor?” but “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” So we should expect that the whole context should answer that question. Do you realize that the main point of this text is not to teach us about love, but to show that we have failed to love as we should, and thus we need salvation? Like this lawyer, many today believe that if they keep the 10 Commandments, & love their neighbor, they will go to heaven. But Jesus shows that we just don’t measure up! No one except our blessed Lord has ever truly loved his neighbor as himself. So let me share with you two of the steps revealed here that will lead to eternal life:

Step 1: Conviction of Sin – After telling the story, Jesus asked the lawyer in v.36, “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” Then the lawyer said in v.37, “He who showed mercy on him.” The lawyer convicted himself out of his own mouth. If the Samaritan showed love to a Jew, then He as a Jew should show love to a Samaritan! So Jesus concluded by saying in the last of v.37, “Go, and do likewise.” With those
words conviction should have pierced his heart. He thought he had been keeping the Law, but through this story he should have realized how far short he had fallen in keeping the Law. He was not as righteous as he thought he was. Indeed, the apostle Paul wrote, “By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal. 2:16). I hope this lawyer turned to God and said, “Oh God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Send the Messiah to save us from our sins.”

Yet, some people today believe that by being good neighbors they can earn their way to heaven. But we all should realize that we have fallen short of keeping the commandments of God. There is not one among us who has not fallen short in fulfilling the law of love. Well how then can we be saved?

Step 2: Turn to Christ and Trust in Him - Though we have all sinned, and though we have all failed to keep God’s law, we can have eternal life because Jesus died for our sins on the cross. Oh, think of the love of Jesus for us! He was not merely attacked by thieves, but he was attacked, wounded, and stripped of His clothing by ungodly men. And He was not left half dead, but they killed Him on a cruel cross. And what the Samaritan gave was generous, but not nearly as generous as what Jesus gave. He gave His life’s blood, and He is willing to give eternal life to anyone who will repent, and believe in Him!

B. Lesson Concerning Love – I have already shared several lessons about love, but I want to focus on one more and it is this: Love Meets Needs. That’s a good definition for love. In this story a man had tremendous physical needs. This man was in immediate need of help for his wounds. He needed some food, clothing, & shelter. That was how the Samaritan showed love. And then there are other types of needs that people have. Many do not have physical needs, but they certainly have emotional needs. Many need friendship love. Some of our elderly need visits. Frank Wynn & I visited some of our homebound members this past week, and they were so appreciative. And one of the greatest ways you can show love to someone is by meeting their spiritual need for life in Jesus Christ by sharing the Gospel with them. Will you show love to someone in need this week? Or will you pass them by?

Conclusion: Wycliffe translator Doug Meland moved to work with Brazil’s Fulnion Indians. They simply called him the white man. That was not a complementary designation, for they had previously had contact with white men who had taken advantage of them. But after he learned their language and started helping them with medicine & in other ways, they started calling him “the respectable white man.” Then when the Melands adapted to the dress & customs of the people, they started calling him “the white Indian.” Then as Doug Meland washed the the dirty, bloody feet of an Indian boy, a bystander said, “Who ever heard of a white man washing the feet of an Indian. Shirley this man is from God. From that day forward they would say, “Here comes the man that God sent to us.”1 That’s the kind of witness that love can have for the Lord. Remember what Jesus said at the conclusion of our story, “Go and do likewise!”


1 Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #3201 (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979);

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