

Who is my neighbor?

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.’”

Luke 10:27

Q: Given the chance to meet and ask one question of one of the world’s great thinkers(i.e. Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, etc...), what question would you ask?

Jesus was known as one who amazed the people of His time with His teachings and how He explained the words of God. In the passage we are looking at today an expert in the law stops Jesus to test him with a question of his own. While this scholar intended to test Him, Jesus has a way of getting through to the heart of the matter and the heart of the person.

As we will see, there is a distinct difference between knowing something in your head and believing it in your heart. As an expert, he knew how God had already answered his question, but his heart still questioned what he was missing. As we study this passage we will find that Jesus's teachings can still cut to the heart today as we apply them to our lives.

Read Luke 10:25-37

Q: When Jesus says, “Do this and you will live” the expert in the law rose to his own defense. Why do you think this question bothered the man so much?

This expert knew all the right things to say. He knew what the word of God said about eternal life. His issue was not a lack of knowledge. His issue was one of insecurity because he knew he could never live up to what he knew to be true. He was wrestling with his knowledge of what is required and his reality that showed him that he would never live up to it.

How often have you had that same experience? How often have you had to reconcile your imperfection with the internal and external pressure to live morally and in such a

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way that brings honor to you and to your family? Jesus often helped people see that their estimation of their obedience was far greater than reality. He did it for this expert and he can help you see it too. Understanding our own inability to live up to the law of God is one of the first steps to pleasing God.

Q: Why do you think this expert asked who he should consider his neighbor?

When Jesus tells this story many things would have been understood that are foreign to us. For instance, the expert in the law would have been very aware why the priest and the Levite would have a hard time helping the man. We would expect the religious people would be the first to help the man in need. But there are cultural issues at play here that need to be understood.

The expert of the law would know that their laws said that if they touched a dead person they would be ceremonially unclean. As an unclean person they would not be able to enter the temple as they normally would but rather they would have to stand outside with the sinners. To return to the community they would have to go through the cleansing rituals that could keep them out of the temple and out of the community for a week.

It would have come at a cost to them to help the man on the side of the road. It would have cost them money, time, and reputation. They would have been looked down upon until they were clean again. They didn't want to be the neighbor to this man because the cost to themselves was too great.

The Samaritan is the person the expert of the law would least expect to be helpful. This is because the Jews and the Samaritans hated each other. Their shared history made for an ugly feud between them and it would have been scandalous for the Samaritan to help the Jew.

Think about that. The Samaritan is not the kind of friend the Jew would have chosen. They didn't have much in common. They had a history that said they should hate one another. But the compassion that God inspires in the heart of His people motivated this guy to step out and help this Jew. They became the most unlikely of friends.

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This could be your story this year. Hopefully you won't get into any serious trouble like this Jew. But you are very likely stepping onto campus and growing an almost entirely new friend group. You had your group in high school that you were used to but college is a new beginning for most people. You will most likely be spending the majority of your time with people who are not exactly like you. Now you could choose to ignore anyone who is different from you, but the most rewarding way to live would be to follow the example of the Samaritan man.

The guys or girls in your life group are probably not all alike. They may not be the same kind of friends you had in high school. You may struggle to find common ground at times. Let's follow the example of the good Samaritan by loving the people around us even when it costs us something.

Instead of counting the cost like the religious people before him, the Samaritan had compassion on the man. He did what needed to be done, at a great cost to himself. He paid for his expenses and made sure he was cared for with no expectation he would receive anything back. He showed us what it is like to love your neighbor as yourself.

Q: Jesus says we must go and do likewise. How can we love our neighbor as ourselves like the Samaritan man in this story?

Q: Why should Christians show mercy?

(1) Because it is an act of humanity to do so. It is human instinct to act, not as the priest and Levite, but very much like the Samaritan, and if the natural man shows mercy to fellow men, how much more should Christians!

(2) Because our profession demands it. We profess to be Christians, followers of Christ, who went about doing good, bringing relief to the afflicted, comfort to the dying and healing the broken-hearted (Luke 4:18). Of what value is our profession if we are not like Him?

(3) Because our own experience demands it. Think what mercy has been shown to us! We were slaves to our sin when He found us; He lifted us up and saved us, making us His own (Psalm 40:1-3). Surely His love should constrain us to go and show mercy to anyone who has need.

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Q: When should Christians show mercy?

(1) When we know of the need. The sin of the priest and Levite was in the fact that they saw and knew about the sad plight of the man, and did not act.

(2) When, in God's providence, such needs cross our paths. In verse 31 we read the word "happened", but there is no such thing as chance in the lives of God's children. If a poor fellow like this Jew crosses our path and we find him half-dead by the road, that is not chance; it is the providence of God, and such opportunities are given to us to show mercy.

(3) When it is in our power to do something (Proverbs 3:27-28). There are times when we are not able to give help – there may be a financial need and we cannot help to meet it; but of course the priest and Levite had the opportunity. They could have ministered, but failed to show mercy. Let us be careful that we do not fail in this way.

Q: How are Christians to show mercy?

The attitude and action of the Good Samaritan will help us to see:-

(1) We are to do so irrespective of who they are. The man by the roadside was a Jew, and consequently the Samaritan might have said, 'Oh, he's a Jew and I'm a Samaritan. I can't help him!' (John 4:9). But he did not say this. He did not allow the barrier of race or place to stand between himself and that poor, needy, half-dead Jew.

(2) We are to do so without expecting any return. The Good Samaritan knew of the Jew's poverty, but that made no difference. He was just as ready, in fact more ready, because of this fact to minister to him. If our motive is pure, anonymity is very commendable!

(3) We are to do so by practical, sacrificial and social help. Have another look at verses 34 and 35. There is one phrase that surely must grip us. We read of the bandages, the oil to soothe, the wine to cleanse, but after all these ministries had been performed, we read that the Good Samaritan "took care of him" – there is our definition of what it really means to show mercy.

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Q: What thoughts or questions do you have about what we have discussed?

Q: What is some way you want to be like the good Samaritan this week?

Pray with one another that God would make you like the good Samaritan.