

Luke 10:25-37 (1984 NIV)
Parable of the Good Samaritan

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" 27 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.'" 28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." 29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' 36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" 37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Introduction

I walked by a shop one time and saw a revolving globe on sale. The map of the world was in the shape of a ball, rotating on a stand. And my eyes caught the name "Yugoslavia" on one side of the ball-shape globe.

I then suddenly realised that the name "Yugoslavia" had already belonged to the pages of history. The country that was once Yugoslavia is now divided into different regions made up of three main ethnicities—Croatian, Serbian, and Bosnian. In fact, these three groups had fought furiously against one another when Yugoslavia broke up as one country.

These people who once had stood together against Hitler in World War II, and fought the mighty German army to a standstill, were fighting and killing one another at the breaking up of the Yugoslavian union. Because of differences in politics, race, and religion, they viewed one another as bitter enemies rather than as fellow countrymen or neighbours at that time.

The conflict among these people is now very much settled as each ethnic group has established their own independence. However, I am reminded that human differences are still very rampant and divisive today. And such differences have often caused humanity to fight one another like bitter enemies, rather than to respect and love one another like good neighbours.

Our text today tells of an expert in the law testing Jesus. He was trying to test if Jesus would say anything contradictory to the law. His specific question was—“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

For one who obviously had a strong sense of self-righteousness, this was not a surprising question. To him, eternal life was something he could attain by doing something on his own.

In response, Jesus told him to do what was in the law, including to love one's neighbour as oneself. The expert in the law had no problem quoting the law—“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.”

However, he had problem loving certain people. For one thing, Jews like him despised the Samaritans who were considered impure in racial and religious heritage.

When Jesus responded in v. 28, “You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live,” this expert in the law was immediately put in his proper place. His own limitation was glaringly exposed for deep inside himself, he knew too well that there was at least one thing in the law he could not do, no matter how eloquently he could quote it. His limitation is this—he could not love a Samaritan as he would love himself.

So this man tried to justify himself by asking, “Who is my neighbour?” As far as he was concerned, it was justifiable to regard some people as his neighbours and others as not.

Jesus then told the Parable of the Good Samaritan to teach him that he should not let any man-made barriers prevent him from loving another person.

The Bible tells us in John 3:16 that God so love the world. His love is not limited only to certain people in the world. In fact, He wants all people in the world to experience His love for them.

But we often let certain attitudes to limit the people we choose to love, so much so that we can even find it hard to love a neighbour. To be a neighbour to others, we need to reflect God's attitude of love for all people as we relate with them.

From the Parable of the Good Samaritan, let's examine some attitudes we can have towards other people when we relate with them, rightly or wrongly. We first look at ...

I. The attitude of the robbers

The parable begins with some robbers attacking a man, presumably a Jew. The robbers in this parable saw this lonely traveller as an object to exploit. They stripped him, beat him, and left him half dead. The man was of no benefit to them after they had gotten all they wanted from him.

The nakedness, the wounds, and the life of this man were of no concern to them because they regard him as one with no worth in himself. The lone Jewish traveller was only an object to be exploited for their own selfish good. We can then describe a robber as exploitative in the sense that he would rip off what belongs to another in order to enrich himself.

Yes, to be a neighbour to someone is not to treat that person as an object to be exploited for our own benefit. If we do, we are like the robbers in the parable—we rob from people the human worth that God has bestowed on them.

This attitude keeps us from recognising that people are worthy in themselves; they are worthy not because of some good that we can get out of them. Otherwise, we attach worth to people only because of what we can get out of them in order to benefit ourselves, and not because of who they are as persons created in God's image. That's not right in God's sight.

We relate with different people each day.

- The good-natured colleague who seldom refuses our requests.
- The helpful parent who helps us take care of our child.
- The VIP customer who does much business with us.
- The reliable subordinate who always obeys and delivers.
- The church member who readily avails his/her service in love.

How do we treat these people? Do we regard them as worthy in themselves, or only in what we can get out of them in order to benefit ourselves?

I remember something that happened many years ago when I was still a school boy. I was an unbeliever then and was invited to an evangelistic camp.

One day after the messages, we were divided into different groups to do house-to-house witnessing around the neighbourhood. I was invited to join one of the groups.

We stopped by a beautiful house, and our group leader introduced us as people from the church to the man at the gate. That man immediately responded, "Oh, you are from the church. How much money do you want me to donate?"

I was both surprised and disturbed to hear what this man had said. Even as an unbeliever then, I was embarrassed to hear that this man had presumed that Christians only approached people to get something out of them; that Christians were kind of exploitative in their attitude towards people.

What kind of attitude are we reflecting as we relate with other people? The robbers were exploitative towards their victim. The Lord disapproved of them. A second attitude we want to look at is ...

II. The attitude of the priest and Levite

We might not be surprised by the lawless behaviour of the robbers because of who they were. But what about the behaviour of the priest and Levite?

These were people who served God in the temple. They were supposed to know the law of love at their finger-tips and to uphold it conscientiously. But both did not respond as they should. They saw the victim and knew for sure that he needed help. However, both turned a blind eye and went the other way. They adopted an attitude of indifference—they saw, they knew, but they decided not to help.

Both understood the law of love very well, but only in their head and not in their heart. Both might have their reasons for not helping.

- They might be in a hurry to reach the temple, and did not want to be defiled by touching a half-dead man because they were temple servants.
- But it seems that they were possibly on their way to somewhere away from the temple. The text in vv. 31 and 32 tells us that both the priest and Levite were “going down the same road”—i.e. the road FROM Jerusalem (where the temple was located) TO Jericho.
- Though Jericho was northeast of Jerusalem, it was the usual thing to say that one was going DOWN from Jerusalem to Jericho instead of going UP. Jerusalem was higher in elevation than Jericho, and so one was literally going down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho even though the direction was northward.
- Thus, it seems that both the priest and Levite were not in a hurry to go and perform some temple duties in Jerusalem. In other words, both of them did not stop to help the victim not because they were in a hurry, but they saw him as a problem to avoid and not a person to love.
- To be a neighbour to that victim is to treat him not as a problem to avoid, but a person to love.

The world today has become so result-oriented and impersonal. People are often seen as tools used to achieve the desired result, thus making result as more important than people.

This danger is also threatening the church today when we do ministry and think only in terms of getting things done; of achieving goals and objectives. Necessary these may be, but we must be reminded at the same time that ministry is very much about people; that relationships are as important as, if not more important than, results.

When I was still single, I was often annoyed by some situations. One of these was to receive a last-minute call from someone saying that he would not be able to lead worship service or teach Sunday School because his child had fallen ill.

I felt annoyed because I was inconvenienced; I had to look for a replacement at short notice. Most of all, the effectiveness of the ministry concerned would be affected because of this. I often said to myself, “Why are all these parents fussing so much over their kids?”

But when I became a father myself, I began to understand differently. I remember one night I was to visit someone in the hospital whose baby was seriously sick.

And that night, my own baby girl was suffering from some infection—she had diarrhoea and there were traces of blood in her stools. My wife and I were very anxious. At last, I answered my own question—“Why are all these parents fussing so much over their kids?” I began to understand and empathise with the anxiety of this parent because I too had a sick baby at home that night.

I have since learnt that I should not view hurting someone as a problem to avoid, but as a person to love and help as the Lord leads.

Indeed in moments like this, we can choose to say, “People need a loving God who cares,” and extend a helping hand in love. Or we can choose to say, “People need a loving God. Who cares?” and move on indifferently like the priest and Levite.

The priest and Levite adopted an attitude of indifference towards the victim. They see the victim as a problem to avoid, not a person to love. The Lord disapproved of them.

A third attitude we can adopt as we relate with others is ...

III. The attitude of the Samaritan

After the priest and Levite, the next person who came onto the scene was the Samaritan. And what did he do? We are told in vv. 33-35—“But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'”

Actually, it's very surprising for a Samaritan to extend help to a Jew, and vice versa. But that was exactly what the Samaritan did. It must also be a surprising and even disturbing lesson as far as the Jewish hearers among Jesus' audience were concerned.

Imagine, Jesus using the example of the Samaritan to teach the Jews, including that Jewish expert in the law, a practical lesson on what it means to love a neighbour. As far as the Jews were concerned, Samaritans were supposed to be impure in race and religion—that's the Jewish prejudice against Samaritans.

Contrarily, the Samaritan's attitude in the parable was one of love in action. He took pity on the victim; he felt compassion for him. In fact, he went the second mile to help him with concrete acts of love.

His attitude broke down the long-standing barrier between Jews and Samaritans.

- For a long time, Jews were prejudiced against Samaritans because they regarded them as impure.
- On the part of the Samaritans, they resented the Jews for their superiority complex.
- So both Jews and Samaritans tried hard to avoid all kinds of contact with each other.
- But the Samaritan in the parable broke down this historical barrier when he regarded the robbed and injured Jew as someone to be rescued, not someone to be resented.

In the same way, to be a neighbour to someone today, we need first to remove those limits set up by our human prejudices and pride. The Samaritan was able to feel compassion for the Jewish victim because he did not allow human prejudice, resentment, and pride to be a barrier. He was able to remove these historical limits that had divided Jews and Samaritans for so long.

Jesus approved of the attitude of the Samaritan—i.e. that of love in action. This was Jesus' very own attitude in the Bible as He dealt with people who needed to experience God's love in a very real and timely manner—e.g. in His feeding of the multitudes; healing of the blind, the crippled, the sick; deliverance of the demonised.

In the same way, the Lord wants us to have the same attitude of love in action towards people in need. But that doesn't mean as long as we love people, all differences are immaterial (including religious beliefs). In Luke 10:10-12, Jesus taught His disciples to wipe the dust off their feet against those who rejected them and their message. Rejection of Christ, the gospel, and those who preach it would bring about God's disapproval. However, our parable today gives us another perspective to consider.

Suppose a Christian comes across his bitterest religious enemy; someone who may have even persecuted him. Suppose this Christian comes across this person who is now in dire need like the robbed and injured Jew, the parable challenges this Christian (like us) to overcome all human resentment and to act as a neighbour to this person; to love this person so that he is acting out the law of love taught by Jesus in Matt. 5:44—"But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ..."

Indeed, if we want to be like the Samaritan in the parable, we need to remove whatever prejudices we may have towards certain individuals or people. What are some of our man-made boundaries that may have alienated us from others?

- Maybe it is that elderly parent who thinks and moves so slowly, and we have no patience with someone who can't keep pace with us.
- Maybe it is that neighbour who can't understand and speak in English, and we feel below us to communicate in that person's dialect.
- Maybe it is that person who keeps talking badly about certain Christians, and we feel offended because he applies that negativity on us as well.
- Maybe it is that colleague who tries to compete with us for that next promotion, and we despise him for it because of his obvious incompetence.

Humanly speaking, it is not easy to love people, especially if they are unlovable or have wronged us. But the Lord demonstrated how to love even one's enemies when He said just before His death on the cross in Luke 23:34—"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." He called forth forgiveness rather than curses or judgement upon those who had wronged Him—that's a concrete act of love, even towards people like His enemies who had gotten Him nailed on the cross.

Someone once said, "To err is human, but to forgive is divine." Yes, it is not easy to love people humanly speaking, especially if they are unlovable or have wronged us. Thus, we need the Lord's help to love as He has loved us; even to forgive as He has forgiven us.

- We need His help to enable us to see the God-given worth in people, even people who may seem unlovable to us.
- We need His help to enable us to show compassion towards people, even people who may seem unlovable to us.

Without doubt, we need the Lord's help to remove whatever prejudices or boundaries or limits that we have set up so that we will and can cross over to others, and be a neighbour to them with the love of the Lord.

Mahatma Gandhi was a great political figure in India. Through non-violent means, he was able to free India from British rule.

He once confessed that he was really interested in Christianity at one time because he thought it offered the real solution to the Hindu caste system that was dividing the Indian people.

One Sunday, he went to church but was refused admission by the ushers who were British. They told him to go and worship with his own people.

In response to this, Gandhi said with sadness, "If Christians have caste differences also, I might as well remain a Hindu."

Gandhi never stepped into a church after that.

Indeed, the human prejudices and pride that we have set up to shut out others who are not like us can surely prevent them from experiencing the love and compassionate touch of God for them. To be a neighbour to others, we need to reflect God's attitude of love for people.

(<https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/he-was-turned-away-from-church>)

Conclusion

- Jesus did not approve of the robbers in the parable because they saw the victim as an object to exploit.

- Jesus did not approve of the priest and Levite because they saw the victim as a problem to avoid.
- But Jesus did approve of the Samaritan because he reflected God's attitude of love for the victim. He was willing to put aside his own prejudices and extended the needed help.

At the end of our text today, Jesus told the expert in the law to "go and do likewise". The example of the Samaritan in the parable would be for this expert to follow. What a "slap in the face" for this expert in the law—he needed a Samaritan, supposedly impure in race and religion, to teach him how to obey the law of God's love.

Indeed, "neighbour" means more than the person who lives next door. It applies to anyone who crosses our path. To be a neighbour is thus to learn to love by meeting the needs of those who cross our path as the Lord leads us.

Let's all be humble to learn to be a good neighbour to others, and to seek the Lord to enable us to put God's love in action as we meet people in the human traffic of everyday life. Amen!