

The Parables of Jesus Week 1: Who is My Neighbor? Luke 10:25-37 **David Bawks - Pathway Community Church (July 4, 2021)**

Good morning Pathway! It's great to be back and see you all again. We enjoyed our time in Maryland, and it was great to see the girls connecting with their grandparents after a long time apart. It was nice to experience rain again! Although I did not enjoy the humidity nearly as much, it was nice to return to a low humidity place.

This month we're starting a new series exploring the Parables of Jesus. In his teaching ministry, Jesus used a variety of stories and metaphors that we call parables. Why did Jesus use parables? The main function that a parable has is "to call forth a response" from whoever is hearing it (Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 152). Jesus told these stories to bring conviction and to provoke a response. He would use everyday examples to make his point clear.

One of the hallmarks of parables is that they tell counter-cultural stories. The values of God's kingdom are opposite in many ways to the values of human society, and Jesus used stories to illustrate and drive home these differences.

For example, Jesus tells one parable is about a businessman who was in the pearl industry. When he came across one pearl of great price, he sold everything else and bought this pearl. Now from a balanced portfolio perspective, this makes no sense. If he loses this one pearl, he has lost everything. He is vulnerable to theft, to the fluctuations of pearl prices, and has a terrible mix of assets. But the message here is the kingdom of God is worth more than anything else, and it requires us to go all in. We can hedge our bets when it comes to faith, that it is all or nothing.

Today we're looking at a different story and please turn with me to Luke chapter 10. I'll read from verse 25 to verse 37.

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 was attacked by 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, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii 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."

This story begins with a very important question: **what must I do to inherit eternal life?** This was a central question for the Jews and remains very important today. Jesus doesn't actually answer, but turns it back to him and asks him how the law answers this. He sums it up by saying we should love God with everything and love our neighbors. Jesus says that this is the right answer, that if he actually does this, then he will live.

But the legal expert doesn't leave it at this. He wants to **justify himself**, he wants to somehow prove to Jesus and the others listening that he knows better, or that Jesus had missed something. We're told at the beginning that this wasn't a genuine question, but instead an attempt to test Jesus, to get him to trip up and expose him as a false teacher to the crowds. So he picks on one aspect of his reply to ask Jesus, who is my neighbor? Then we get this famous story of a man robbed on the road.

As we explore this story, I have two questions to ask you.

1) Who do you struggle to see as a hero?

In understanding and applying this story today, there's one big problem. This parable is a victim of its own success. The problem with this parable is that our primary association with Samaritans is from this parable, and it is seeing them as humanitarians. We have Good Samaritan hospitals, we have the Samaritan's Purse organization, and so on. But this is not at all how the Jews of Jesus' time would have seen Samaritans. Samaritans were mixed race, the descendants of Jews who intermarried with their foreign conquerors and then settled into the area between Judah in the south and Israel in the north.

Their differences were significant and included religious disagreements: "Samaritans only regarded the five books of the Torah as 'Scripture'; they had their own version of these texts (the Samaritan Pentateuch), and—in violation of Deut 12; they worshipped God in their own temple at Mount Gerizim rather than at the temple in Jerusalem" (<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/main-articles/good-samaritan>). This is what Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well discussed in another incident.

They didn't just disagree, but also fought against each other as enemies, and would have viewed each other in a similar way as Christians and Muslim extremists view each other today: a dangerous ethnic and religious enemy. "In 128 B.C.E. some Jews destroyed the Samaritan temple" (<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/main-articles/good-samaritan>).

The title we commonly use for this parable, Good Samaritan, is partly based on this history of prejudice and racism, implying that to be good is an exceptional quality and worthy of notice as a Samaritan. Notice that the word good is never used in the biblical text. Imagine a story called "The Good White Person." It's like telling someone you're very eloquent, for a black person, or Hispanic, or whoever: it is a compliment, yes, but based on a racist assumption.

So having the hero as a Samaritan would be shocking, unthinkable, and completely contrary to everyone's expectation. At the end, when Jesus asks which of the three was a neighbor, the legal expert can't even bring himself to use the word Samaritan, but instead just says "the one who had mercy." Given our very different current position, let me retell this parable for Pathway today.

A family is on their way to church when their car breaks down. An Anglican pastor drives by, but is running late and does not stop. A Methodist bishop then comes by, but decides not to stop.

Let's pause here for a minute. If you were telling this story, who would you bring along next? Who would you cast as the hero after the other church leaders failed? Here's a hint: this is a Baptist church. Obviously, the correct hero will be a Baptist pastor. Jesus was telling this story to an expert in the law, who may not have thought much of the priests or the Levites. There was a divide in Jewish religion between the priestly types, the religious order, against the rabbis and Pharisees, the experts in the law. The Pharisees prided themselves on almsgiving to the poor; that was their big thing (*How to Read the Bible*, 155). The lawyer listening to Jesus would have thought of course the priest and the Levite are not going to help and would have been expecting a Pharisee to be the third person, who would now bring help.

Ok back to the parable: A family is driving when their car breaks down. An Anglican pastor drives by, but is running late and does not stop. A Methodist bishop then comes by, but decides not to stop. Then a homeless guy who lives in his car sees the family and stops. He waits until a tow truck comes for the car and then gives the family a ride to the garage. He waits until the car is fixed and even offers to buy them lunch while they wait. Of these three, which one was a neighbor to the family?

Go and do likewise. Here's another way we could retell this parable:

Japan experiences a terrible calamity as an earthquake strikes Tokyo and thousands of buildings are destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people are homeless and in need of food and shelter. The European Union extends its regrets that it is unable to send any assistance. China is also unable or unwilling to help. Then, another country reaches out and says they can rehouse and feed all of those in need. The nation of Burundi sends enough aid to provide all that is needed to rebuild and offers to resettle any interested Japanese citizens to Burundi.

Let me ask, how many of you were expecting me to say Burundi? Obviously, there's no way you could have anticipated me saying that of all the countries in the world. In case you're not familiar with it, Burundi is a small country just south of Rwanda. They are not known for the size of their national budget or their international connections. They would be an unlikely hero. This scenario reminds me of the end of the movie *Black Panther*, the King of the fictional kingdom of Wakanda in Africa is doing a

press conference, and announces that they are no longer going to be isolated, but will begin to send aid to other countries around the world. The press is puzzled, and they asked what possible aid Wakanda would have to give.

Who do you struggle to see as a hero? Whoever that is, especially if it is any kind of racial or national or ethnic category, is likely the person that Jesus would have used to tell you this story. Jesus was confronting this religious leader with his ignorance and prejudice. Notice as well that Jesus reframed the question of neighbor from someone who receives aid to someone who provides help. He doesn't say your neighbor is the person around you in need, but instead says that a good neighbor is the one who steps up to solve a problem. The neighbor is the one who takes action.

There's another angle we can take to apply this parable today, especially how it relates to racism and white supremacy in American churches. In 1816, reacting against the current white church denominations that practice exclusion and discrimination, there was a new denomination formed called the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first independent black denomination in the United States. Their first church in the south, starting in 1817, was Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C.

In June 2015, Dylan Roof, a 21-year-old white supremacist, studied and prayed with parishioners at Emanuel AME Church. After the Bible study, Roof opened fire and killed nine members of the church. In the aftermath, rather than crying out for retaliation, the congregation prayed for Roof, even as they buried their dead. They offered him words of forgiveness. (<https://baptistnews.com/article/want-to-understand-critical-race-theory-read-the-good-samaritan-story/#.YN9XeehKg2z>)

This week I read an article by Susan Shaw and Regina McClinton on the Baptist News Global website who relate this terrible incident to the story of the Samaritan by writing this:

We might easily read this story with Dylan Roof as the attacker who leaves someone in a ditch by the side of the road. But what if we read it with Roof in the ditch, wounded by legacies of white supremacy, with Black members of Mother Emanuel as those who show him compassion?

Where does that leave other white people? Like Roof in the ditch and in need of compassion and healing from racism? Or like the priest and Levite who walk on by, too invested in their own racial and religious purity to help? Or the lawyer, trying to justify themselves?

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Another truth of the story is the role Black people play in the liberation of white people from the sin of racism. The Samaritan saw helping the injured man as part of his responsibility as a citizen of this world, as a human being. He didn't need to be thanked; he didn't need to be repaid. He needed to be able to look at himself in the mirror and know that he had done the right thing. He knew what it was to be dismissed, discriminated against, stepped over. And so he, like many people of color, gave to someone who could be his enemy, because he understood love for his fellow human to be for all people, not just those who look like him.

This also seems to be the plight of people of color in this country, especially Black people. The racial liberation of white people rests on the work of people of color. This work takes many

forms, such as leading marches to protest racial violence; devoting one's academic scholarship to explaining what race and racism are; giving guidance on how to be anti-racist; and organizing community conversations with white neighbors.

White people have their own work to do, but it always happens in relationship with the work of people of color to dismantle racism. (<https://baptistnews.com/article/want-to-understand-critical-race-theory-read-the-good-samaritan-story/#.YN9XeehKg2z>)

Who do you struggle to see as a hero? A major focus of this parable as told by Jesus was to bring conviction for an attitude of racial prejudice. We still need that conviction today. Here's my second question:

2) What kind of neighbor am I?

Sometimes one of the ways we can actually weaken the message of this parable is by saying that everyone is my neighbor. I should be a good neighbor to anyone in need. This is true, but the problem is that this can lead me to not really being a neighbor to anyone in particular. "Pope Francis cites the priest and Levite as examples of the 'globalization of indifference.' Whenever we think 'that's not my problem' or 'they don't belong to me,' we're acting more like the priest and Levite than the Samaritan." (<https://millennialjournal.com/2019/07/13/how-to-really-understand-the-parable-of-the-good-samaritan/>)

The reason that the lawyer asked who is my neighbor was not actually to find out who his neighbor was, but who his neighbor wasn't. He wants to know, who do I not need to love? This means that to ask the question, who is your neighbor, is kind of the wrong question. Instead, we should ask What kind of neighbor am I? or To whom am I a neighbor? (<https://millennialjournal.com/2019/07/13/how-to-really-understand-the-parable-of-the-good-samaritan/>)

I've just started reading the book *The Art of Neighboring*, and they use this story to ask the question, what if Jesus meant that we should love our actual neighbors? The people who live right around us? I'm excited about the possibilities we have as things open up of reconnecting with our neighbors, having them over for dinner, and restarting life groups that meet in homes. We'll talk about this more over the next few months, and I hope we can lead the way in getting to know our neighbors, and building meaningful community with them.

Earlier I asked, "who do you struggle to see as a hero?" if you were in trouble, who is the last person you would expect to receive help from, either here from church, at work or in your neighborhood? Why?

The Samaritan in the story demonstrates that being a neighbor takes effort, time and resources. He went out of his way. He demonstrated courage, in stopping in a dangerous place where he could also be putting himself at risk. He gave of his money to help. He demonstrated generosity in going above and beyond what anyone would have expected by taking him to the inn and even covering the future costs of his stay and recovery.

Let's go and do likewise.