

Who is My Neighbor?

Storyteller #6

3. Reflection

Matthew 9:13 NLT - 13 Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."

1 John 3:18 NLT - 18 Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.

As we consider what we can learn from this parable we need to take seriously how Jesus felt about showing mercy. When he called Matthew to be his disciple, he quotes the Old Testament. God desires mercy rather than sacrifice. Jesus calls to those who know they are sinners, not those who think they are righteous. And how do we know if we are loving our neighbor and showing mercy- by what we do.

Take some time to reflect on how you view yourself. Are there areas you have withheld mercy and failed to love others? Does God need to soften your heart to be more compassionate rather than selfish. Have you substituted church attendance and offerings for obedience? Let God touch and restore you in any of these areas so that you can be a neighbor to all you meet.

WRAP-UP

It's easy to hear this parable and see ourselves as the Good Samaritan because we probably help a stranger now and then. But what if we are the religious leaders who see ourselves as righteous and cross to the other side when people need help. God can soften our hearts if we are willing to let Him. There is a world that needs to be shown mercy and God wants to use us to reach them.

MEMORY VERSE

The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these." - Mark 12:31 NLT

Challenge – Pray and expect that God will set up a divine encounter for you this week with someone you can be a good neighbor to.

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes Bible phrases make their way into our everyday language, and we don't even realize it. Did you know "apple of my eye" (Ps 17:8), "escaped by the skin of my teeth" (Job 19:20) or "the writing on the wall" (Daniel ch 5) are from the Bible? This week's parable is one of those phrases. It is the parable of the Good Samaritan. California even uses the term in our Good Samaritan Law that protects someone who helps a stranger. And that is what this parable has come to be known for; someone who helps a stranger. To understand it better, let's consider who Jesus was addressing and just what we should learn from it.

Ice Breaker

Have you ever had a "Good Samaritan experience"? Were you to giver or receiver of the kindness?

Key Passage

Luke 10:25-29 NLT - 25 One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: "Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 Jesus replied, "What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?" 27 The man answered, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" 28 "Right!" Jesus told him. "Do this and you will live!" 29 The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Justification

In our key passage, the religious expert who asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life would have been intimately familiar with the law of Moses. So, when Jesus asked the man what the law of Moses said, he answered correctly. In fact, his response quoted two passages from the Torah.

Matthew 22:40 NLT - 40 The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

In Matthew's account of this story, what did Jesus tell us about the importance of these commandments? How do you think this statement impacted the questioner whose life and livelihood were based on religious law?

The man must have done a quick assessment of his life in light of these two commandments. It appears that he might have come up short in the "Love your neighbor as yourself" department.

In verse 29 he asks, "Who is my neighbor?". What is his reason for that question? What answer do you think he was hoping for? A neighbor (plēision) according to the Jews, was any member of the Hebrew nation and commonwealth. If you reflect on how much you love your neighbor, do you immediately think of those living on your street? What if you widen the circle to include anyone you interact with?

Jesus didn't reply to the man's question with a definition but with a story.

Luke 10:30-32 NLT - 30 Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. 31 "By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. 32 A Temple assistant [Levite] walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

There are some important points to note in this story. The traveler was a Jew, and he was traveling alone on a route known to be very dangerous. The first people to encounter him were Jewish religious leaders with a duty to obey the law of Moses and teach others to do so.

When the priest saw him and the Levite walked over to him, the wounded man must have thought his prayers were answered. What excuses might they have had for disregarding this man in need? How did the response of the priest and Levite reveal the condition of their hearts? How would you have felt if you were the man left behind by the priest and Levite?

Today we have a positive view of Samaritans because of this parable, but at that time they were despised by the Jews because they were a community that had intermarried with Assyrians, half-breeds. As a result, they were rejected by those who were fully Hebrew and barred from the Temple in Jerusalem. They developed their own form of worship and a separate temple. This was strictly forbidden by Jewish Law.

Luke 10:33-35 NLT - 33 "Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. 34 Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. 35 The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, "Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here."

The unlikely hero of this parable overcame deep racial and ethnic barriers to care for the man in need. What motivated the Samaritan to render aid to the wounded man? How did his actions reveal the condition of his heart?

2. Jesus' Correction

The priest and Levite spent their days in the Temple serving, studying, and teaching the Law of Moses, yet their hearts were unchanged. The Samaritan who was rejected and despised was the one who had compassion on the man in need, essentially his enemy, and sacrificed his time and resources to save him. *Who does this remind us of?*

The book of Leviticus is filled with the laws that God gave to Moses for all aspects of life. But following the law was never able to save us.

If we are no longer "under the Old Testament law", should we be concerned with obeying the commandments? Why would we follow those laws?

Galatians 5:13 NLT - 13 For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.

It seems that the priest and Levite followed the law but missed the point. They should have known what the prophet Isaiah told the people that God desires.

Luke 10:36-37 NLT - 36 "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. 37 The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

Jesus let the man answer his own question. Who was a neighbor? Notice he didn't say "the Samaritan". How does this redefine what it means to be a neighbor? Who's been this kind of neighbor to you? How? How would it feel for a Jew to be told to "do likewise" as a Samaritan?