

Week of February 10, 2013 *Indifference or Compassionate Action?*

Passage Outline

1. Ask the Right Questions (Luke 10:25-29)
2. Don't Make Excuses (Luke 10:30-32)
3. Respond in the Right Way (Luke 10:33-37)

What's Our Study About?

God expects His people to demonstrate love toward all people. Our study focuses on Jesus' question, "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor?" (Luke 10:36).

1. Ask the Right Questions – Read Luke 10:25-29

The context of Jesus' famous parable of the good Samaritan is a conversation He had with a lawyer, a scholar in the study of the Mosaic law and the traditions, during His journey to Jerusalem. Conceivably Jesus and those following Him had stopped to rest so that they were sitting on the ground, perhaps for a meal. Just then an expert in the law stood up to test Him, which indicates that this lawyer was hostile to Jesus and His teachings. The lawyer's question for Jesus was, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Debates among the rabbis concerning this question provided slightly different answers, but they likely emphasized the necessity of following the teachings of the elders. The Jewish leaders were painfully aware of Jesus' blatant disregard of these man made traditions.

Read the article "The Jewish Lawyer." It is related to this lesson and can be found in the Heavy Duty Preparation Packet.

Jesus' answer pointed the man to the Mosaic law: "What is written in the law?" He asked him. "How do you read it?" To the man's credit, he correctly quoted both the first and second greatest commandments (see Matthew 22:34-40): "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." These two commandments appear in the law of Moses (see Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18), so that every law in some way is a specific example of how the Israelites showed their love for God or others. The connection of the second one to the first is that those who love God must love those He created in His image—that is, everyone. Thus, the actions of the Israelites reflected their love for Yahweh, the God of Israel, and this showed their faith in Him. The lawyer was correct, as Jesus affirmed: "You've answered correctly," He told him. "Do this and you will live."

One of the axiom's of life is that if you ask the wrong question in a particular situation, you will inevitably get the wrong answer. This is true unless you ask Jesus the question, and then He will provide the correct answer anyway! Instead of wanting to know how to love others, the lawyer wanted to know if he could limit the people he had to love. He, like all of us, had people in his life whom he did not like and certainly felt no obligation to love. So the lawyer asked Jesus a question he hoped would get him off the hook: But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Read the article "Who is My 'Neighbor?'" It is related to this lesson and can be found in the Heavy Duty Preparation Packet.

God's laws were not designed to give us the easy way to please Him. In fact, as Jesus' response in this parable shows, God's way is often quite difficult for us to do. Jesus' answer to the lawyer's question focuses more on the nature of love than on whom we should love, for that part is simple. We should love everyone.

What kind of questions do you ask Jesus? The expert in the law seemed to be on the right track with his first

question, but in “wanting to justify himself,” he betrayed his true intent. Think of questions you have asked God over the past several weeks. Were you seeking to understand and obey God’s Word, or attempting to justify or rationalize what you had already chosen? Explain.

2. Don’t Make Excuses for Not Loving – Read Luke 10:30-32

The Gospels record over 40 parables in Jesus’ teaching ministry, demonstrating this was one of His favorite teaching methods. A parable normally intends to teach one main truth or principle, though rather long parables, like the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) and the unforgiving slave (Matt. 18:23-35), might have two or three points. We need to give great attention to the context of a parable to determine what Jesus was illustrating by using the parable. (That is what a parable does—it is a verbal illustration of a spiritual truth.) When studying a parable, we need to avoid turning it into an allegory so that the symbolism is interpreted in ways that are far removed from Jesus’ original intent. The safeguard for interpreting this parable is that it illustrates what it means to be a neighbor.

Jesus began the parable by describing what was, likely, a rather common occurrence in those days: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers.” Even though unlikely that the people experienced this personally, they would have been familiar with the danger of traveling through the Judean countryside. Robbers roamed those areas looking for easy prey, and someone traveling alone like this man would make the perfect target: “They stripped him, beat him up, and fled, leaving him half dead.” Jesus’ intent here was to show the man’s desperate situation and that he would die if someone didn’t come along to help.

Read the article “Jericho in Jesus’ Day.” It is related to this lesson and can be found in the Heavy Duty Preparation Packet.

The drama of the story increases when two people come along whom Jesus’ audience would have expected to help out. “A priest happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.” Both Levites and priests were held in high esteem by the Jewish people, so it must have startled them to hear Jesus say that they refused to help a fellow Jew lying on the side of the road. This makes the Samaritan’s actions all the more unexpected and surprising, providing a much more powerful illustration of being a good neighbor.

Don’t do too much with a parable. Do not speculate on why the priest and the Levite did not come to the aid of the victim. These are fictional characters that Jesus created for this parable. It is safe to say that Jesus picked them as representative of the highest order of Jewish religion, and for His purpose in the story they utterly fail. By passing by on the other side of the road and ignoring the man’s needs, they describe the unwillingness of many of the Jews’ religious leaders to love their neighbors as themselves. They did the opposite of what the audience listening to Jesus would have expected, just as the Samaritan did the opposite as well.

The characters in the parable might be fictional, but you and I are very real with real thoughts, feelings, and motives. Which of the following best describes an excuse you would most likely use?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don’t have time. | <input type="checkbox"/> It’s too dangerous. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don’t want to get that involved. | <input type="checkbox"/> It would cost too much. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don’t know if it’s an honest need. | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

3. Respond in the Right Way – Read Luke 10:33-37

Jesus’ audience may have expected Jesus’ story to have a hero, but not one from Samaria. That is why this parable would have had such a strong impact on His original audience. The animosity between Jews and Samaritans was second to none.

A bit of history helps understand the situation. The Samaritans were the offspring of Jews who intermarried with other nationalities during the time of exile. Large numbers of them settled between Judea and Galilee in a territory called Samaria after the name of the capital city there. The Jews considered them half-breeds while the Samaritans believed they were the true chosen people of God. The Samaritans accepted only the five Books of Moses as Scripture, and they even had their own version of it in the Hebrew language with textual additions not in the Hebrew Bible. A major point of contention about interpreting the Pentateuch was where the temple would eventually be built. The Jews said Mount Zion in Jerusalem, of course, but the Samaritans said Mount Gerizim in Shechem. The Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim by 330 B.C., but the Jewish ruler John Hyrcanus destroyed it in 128 B.C. By the time of Jesus, the Samaritan temple had been gone about 160 years. But still the hatred between these two groups of people was still strong and fierce, to the degree that Jews would normally go around Samaria rather than go straight through it when traveling from Galilee to Judea or vice versa (but compare John 4:4). Neither party would even eat a meal with the other (“associate” in John 4:9 is literally, “use together,” as in “share dishes”).

Yet Jesus said that this Samaritan had compassion on this dying Jew! Jews were considered enemies of Samaritans, but this Samaritan’s compassion drove him to action anyway: “He went over to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on olive oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.” He then did more than save the victim’s life; he used his own money to assure he was brought back to full health: “The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him. When I come back I’ll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend.’” The Samaritan financed the victim’s recovery (a denarius was a day’s wage), even willing to spend more if necessary.

Read the article “Of Inns and Inns.” It is related to this lesson and can be found in the Heavy Duty Preparation Packet.

One can imagine the looks of shock on the faces of Jesus’ audience when He got to the climax of this parable. To drive the point home even more, Jesus put the lawyer on the spot with a question of His own: “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” Jesus emphasized what it means for His followers to be good neighbors, not our attempts at identifying who our neighbors are.

Jesus clearly showed the lawyer that all people are his neighbors—if a Samaritan is, then everyone is! But the lawyer was willing to admit Jesus’ point only in a roundabout way, saying “The one who showed mercy.” Perhaps the words, “The Samaritan,” stuck in his throat and he simply couldn’t say them! But he did get the right answer, and this is when Jesus delivered the clincher: “Go and do the same.” Jesus calls on all of His disciples to show compassion to those in need, regardless of race, gender, economic status, political persuasion, religion, or any other factors that can be used to separate people. Like the Samaritan, we must be willing to alter our plans to help someone. Sometimes we need to stop what we are doing and show the love of Christ to those in need even if they hate Him and/or us.

Biblical Truths of This Lesson in Focus

1. We are to continually study the Scriptures to find what God wants us to do.
2. God still demands that His people love Him most of all and love others as well.
3. Believers need to stop trying to justify their lack of compassion toward certain people.
4. Even religious leaders (Ministers and Pastors) do not always live up to God's standard of conduct on the most basic issues, like loving one's neighbors.
5. We as Christians must show compassion to those in need even if they are our enemies.
6. "How can I respond in love?" is the question we should ask ourselves rather than "Who should I love?"

Word Study: *Had Compassion* (v. 33)

The Greek word translated "had compassion" in Luke 10:33 derives from the noun meaning compassion, pity, or tender mercy. The literal meaning of the noun is bowels, intestines, or inner organs, which occurs in this sense only once in the New Testament—the suicide of Judas (Acts 1:18). The intestines were considered the seat of the emotions in Greek thought. In the New Testament, and there are 10 other occurrences of the noun and they refer to God's compassion for His people (Luke 1:78) or the compassion that Christians should have for each other (2 Cor. 6:12; 7:15; Phil. 1:8; 2:1; Col. 3:12; Philem. 7,12,20; 1 John 3:17).

The verb coming from the noun occurs 12 times in the New Testament, all of them in the Gospels. Further, in all 12 instances Jesus is the one who shows compassion or a character in one of His parables does. Jesus had compassion on the crowds of needy and sick people (Matt. 9:36 [Parallel in Mark 6:34]; 14:14; 15:32 [Parallel in Mark 8:2]; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 9:22; Luke 7:13). Three of Jesus' parables have compassionate characters: (1) the master who forgave his servant's huge debt (Matt. 18:27)—his action exemplify God the Father and should exemplify believers; (2) the good Samaritan who helped the half-dead Jewish man (Luke 10:33)—he illustrates the meaning of the second greatest commandment all believers must emulate; and (3) the father who rejoiced over the return of his prodigal son (Luke 15:20)—showing that God rejoices over those who repent.