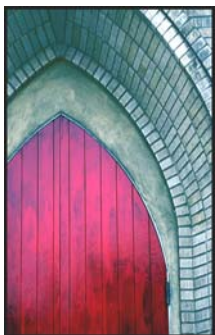


# MISSIONS & OUTREACH

## Part 3 - And Who Is My Neighbor?

SCRIPTURE TEXT:

LUKE 10:25-37 (ESV)



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### More Work to Do:

As we continue on in this series, it is on the foundation of the first two parts. In part one, we stressed that missions is the **SECOND** greatest activity in the world because there is only one **GREATEST** human activity—Worship. God is ultimate, not man, and though there will come a day when missions will cease, worship will continue on forever. From this premise, we moved on in part 2 to consider the heart behind Jesus' call to care for the poor. He calls us to a life where we rely on mercy, and it's by grace that He would call us out from under vain

confidences in our own abilities to rescue us from the peril of our sin—and so a life called to caring for the poor is a mercy in itself, because it keeps before us the truth that in our sinful state we are the ones lying in the road, and Christ is our "Good Samaritan" who comes and lifts us up and heals us.

With this understood, we are reminded that Jesus doesn't tell this parable to the lawyer to cast him away, but to draw him close. But we have more work to do with this Parable. We still need to examine what it is to love our neighbor and also to define mercy. Over the next two weeks, we will define mercy and unpack its practical applications. But today we turn to the question the parable is answering—"Who is my neighbor?"

### Luke 10:25-37

<sup>25</sup>And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>26</sup>He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" <sup>27</sup>And he answered, "You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself." <sup>28</sup>And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

<sup>29</sup>But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" <sup>30</sup>Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup>Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

<sup>33</sup>But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup>He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup>And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "Take care of him,

and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' <sup>36</sup>Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" <sup>37</sup>He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

### Concern on the Pass of Blood:

The 18 mile stretch of road from Jerusalem to Jericho has often been referred to as the **Pass of Blood**. It is a desolate path following the Wadi Qilt—a dried up riverbed descending almost 4,000 feet from the hilltop city of Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea, the lowest point on the face of the earth. It was the dark back alley of Palestine, notorious for the crimes committed there in the crags and nooks of the desert walls containing it.

This is the story of victimizers and their victim. But it is also the story of the indifferent and the concerned. The indifferent were the most likely to be concerned, but perhaps the **Pass of Blood** changes people. We don't know who the robbers were, but we are left to assume their victim was a Jew, since the parable in this conversation between two teachers of the Law took place on the **Pass of Blood** in Judea—and since Jesus makes the point that the one who helped was not a Jew.

So as the man in the road lies clinging to life, a Priest happens along, but crosses over to the other side of the road. We'd expect compassion from him, but instead what we get is indifference. The same goes for the Levite, from an educated upper class clan among the Israelites. His was a life of privilege & honor. Jesus doesn't tell us why they ignored their brother, just that they did. Perhaps He left this detail out so we could fill it in. Certainly Jesus wants us to identify with these men too.

You're the priest. Touching a dead man makes you ceremonially unclean, and you'd have to miss a couple weeks of work if you got involved and he died while you were carrying him. How would it serve your congregation to defile yourself like that? You're the Levite. You don't travel on this road without purpose. You're an important person on a journey. People anticipate your arrival. You don't want to be rude to your hosts, or keep your family waiting. Or perhaps you observe the freshness of the man's wounds and fear the robbers are still around. You might be in mortal danger if you get involved. We don't know why they excused themselves, but we can imagine.

This Samaritan actually had the best excuse to pass by. Hatred between the Jews and Samaritans ran deep. In 721BC the northern kingdom of Israel was carried off by the Assyrians. During their exile, they intermarried with their captors. They returned to their land as a mixed race who became known as Samaritans, and to the southern kingdom of Jews who had not intermarried during their exile in Babylon, the Samaritans had done the unthinkable—they had defiled the bloodline of Abraham. To the Jews, Samaritans were worse than full-fledged "gentiles"—they were half gentiles and half Israelites. If Jesus had told story other way around, with the Samaritan in road, lawyer wouldn't have understood Jesus' point. "What do you do when you find a Samaritan lying beaten in the road? You assume God's providential judgment has caught up with him."

This wasn't a one-way street either. Samaritans were just as disrespectful to the Jews as the Jews were to them. It was a "nationalistic" world. Individuals represented the nations to which they belonged. It didn't matter if a particular Samaritan had personally wronged a particular Jew. One Samaritan represented all of Samaria and one Jew represented all of Israel. So it had a dramatic effect that the **Samaritan** was the one who stopped to help the man dying in his path. But it was also quite to the point of Jesus' answer to the question that initiated this parable—"Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answers, "Beyond race, beyond class, beyond religion, your neighbor is anyone in your path."

## *Flipping the Question Around:*

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So the answer to the question "Who is my neighbor?" is "**ANYONE IN YOUR PATH.**" Are we ready to call it a day now? Is this the sum total of Jesus' answer to the lawyer's question concerning the keeping of the 2<sup>nd</sup> great command? Jesus doesn't just tell him who his neighbor is, but what real neighboring looks like. His parable asks the lawyer, "Do you act as a neighbor to the people in your path who need your help?" Do you see what Jesus is doing here? **He is changing gears by refining the question.** Loving your neighbor is not so much about defining what a **neighbor** is as it is defining what **love** is. James Boice helps; "We say, 'Whom should I love?' or 'How many people can I love?', thus hoping to limit our obligation. Jesus asks, 'Do you love? Never mind whom; for if you do love, then your love will inevitably operate as it should when you come across the needy.'"

**What path does love require?** It is the definition of "love," not "neighbor" that we must pursue to get at the heart of this command. Just to say we're called to love anyone in our path is not quite getting at the heart of the command if the only people in our path are people just like us because we've structured our lives to only know and be around those in the same position as us. Love directs and often changes the path we walk.

Consider the Samaritan's path. When he found the dying man, he had compassion on him and **compassion changed his path.** He took this man on as **HIS** burden, presumably abandoning his course in order to care for him. He eventually went about his business, but only with the promise to return in a couple of days to settle any further debts or costs. "**What is the path love requires?**" Can't you even hear the question in the word "**Outreach**"—that love requires reaching beyond ourselves?

## *The Path Love Requires:*

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We have, now, an opportunity for sober reflection on the folly of the Law Expert. The Law he professed to know is loaded with references which explain that the heart of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Command does not lie in the definition of "neighbor" but in the definition of "love." The command is marked by action, not delineation. It is choosing your path, not just interrupting the path you're already on. It is sobering because if we can't relate to the lawyer on any other point, we can relate to him on this one. It is easier to be told what to do than it is who to be.

Consider a few samples from the Old Testament. Isa 1:15 says, "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." What is it to love your neighbor as yourself? It is to defend the helpless, and you can't defend them until you stand beside them. And to do that, you must go to where they are. Loving well requires that our path takes us in the direction of the helpless, not away from them.

Or Deut 15:7-8: "If one of your brothers should become poor you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him until his need is no more." What is it to love your neighbor as yourself? It is to give to your poor brother as you would give to your own poverty. It is to count your neighbor's poverty as your own burden to bear. But to bear his burden, your path must lead you to where he is. Loving well requires that our path takes us in the direction of the poor, not away from them.

Or Leviticus 19:9-10 "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner." What is it to love your neighbor as yourself? It is to consider your property, your home as a place where the poor, even the foreigner find rest and have basic felt needs met.

These passages alone tell us loving well includes intercession in the face of injustice as well as relief in the face of poverty. Love includes leaving your home in search of bringing mercy to the poor as well as opening your home in such a way that the poor might find you. Factor in the Great Commission which extends this call to the uttermost parts of the earth. It's overwhelming. There are so many in our own city in need of mercy that we'd never get caught up enough here to spare one single missionary to send to another part of the world. Yet the need around the world is so great that we could never catch up enough there to minister to the widow next door. Where do we begin?

## *One Foot In Front of the Other:*

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The call to love requires that our path takes us in the direction of the poor and needy, not away from them. And where is that exactly? Well, it's everywhere. The one lying in the road in need of mercy is everywhere. And we hear Jesus' great commission from Acts 1:8 to be His witnesses in "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and ends of earth," and our instinct is to get organized—to assemble our crusade. At times this is precisely what is needed. But this is not what the man in the parable needed—he just needed one person. So where do we begin?

May I submit that it is by placing one foot in front of the other, walking a path that takes us in the direction of the poor and needy, not away. Take your children or your friends with you. That's it. For some of you, this may lead you to China or the heart of the Congo, and for others it may lead you to learn the name of your barista at Starbucks or befriend the single mom or Arabic family next door. You may ask, is that enough? With all respect, that's the wrong question. Is it an act of worship?

In Matt 25, Jesus tells of the Father receiving His people into Glory, saying, "When I was hungry you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." The righteous answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you, or sick or in prison and visit you?' The King will say, 'As you did it to one of the least of my brothers, you did it to me.'"

Loving your neighbor well is an act of worship—and we know it is because Jesus receives it as such. And who is your neighbor? Its anyone in your path. Beloved, the path to loving your neighbor well leads to the hurting and the poor, not away from them. But can't you see, it also leads to unspeakable riches—the richness of a life wrapped up in loving what Jesus loves. This is the most authentic way to live. It is a life of worship!