

Love your neighbor as yourself. Love can be costly. A huge distance separated the Samaritan from the covenant people of God. He crossed that distance and became the neighbor. We need to cross the distance of RACE. Do we harbor an antipathy or even hatred for certain races? Would we be willing to cross the road to help such in distress? That is what Jesus would do. We need to cross the distance of SPACE. Jesus' story makes it clear that we cannot restrict 'neighbor' to the person living next door or even in the same street. In one sense we live in a much bigger world than those who first heard the story. Inhabitants of Jerusalem would not know what was happening to the people of Nazareth, let alone those who live 12,000 miles away. But we also live in a smaller world. Ease of travel and communication has brought all the people of the world nearer together. Genuine sympathy and practical kindness can be a reality even across 12,000 miles. By putting a coin on a plate we can be involved in the healing and the bringing of Good News in every part of the globe. We need to cross the distance of CHARACTER. Do we only help the godly and the morally upright? Those who deserve our help? Our neighbor, as Jesus sees it, is not the person who is up and who can assist us on our way. It is the one who is down and whom we can help to rise. The one in need of our sympathy and our help, who has a bruised and bleeding heart can be healed only by patient and sacrificial love.

A QUESTION OF DECISION

Jesus finished his story and turned back to the lawyer. **“What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?”** The answer was obvious. The one who showed mercy was the neighbor. Jesus said, **“Go and do the same.”** It was time for decision and action.

A neighbor heard that a poor woman was reduced to extreme poverty by the loss of her cow, which was her only means of support. He was personally unable to replace the cow for the poor woman, so he went around requesting funds. Each neighbor offered sorrow and regret, but none practical assistance. He became impatient, and after being answered as usual by a plentiful shower of feeling, exclaimed. “Oh, yes! I don’t doubt your feeling; but you don’t feel in the right place.” “Oh,” said one, “I feel with all my heart and soul.” “Yes, yes,” replied the neighbor, “I don’t doubt that either; but I want you to feel in your pocket.”¹

GREAT THINGS HE HAS TAUGHT US GREAT THINGS HE HAS DONE Answering Important Questions Luke 10:25-37

INTRODUCTION

Sixteen-year-old daughter: “Has anyone seen my new sweater?”
Her father: “You mean the one that cost thirty dollars?”
Her sister: “You mean the one you won’t let me wear?”
Her brother: “You mean the stupid one that makes you look fat?”
Her grandma: “You mean the one with the low neckline?”
Her mother: “You mean the one that has to be washed by hand in cold water?”
Everyone was talking about the same sweater, but no one answered her question. Jesus was asked two important questions. He answered them both. Then he asks us a question.

A QUESTION OF SALVATION

A brand new lawyer in his brand new office on his first day in practice sees a prospective client walk in the door. He decides he should look busy, so he picks up the phone and starts talking: “Look, Harry, about that amalgamation deal. I think I better run down to the factory and handle it personally. Yes. No. I don’t think 3 million will swing it. We better have Rogers from Seattle meet us there. OK. Call you back later.” He looks up at the visitor and says, “Good morning, how may I help you?” And the prospective client says, “You can’t help me at all. I’m just here to hook up your phone.”

The lawyer who had a question for Jesus was an expert in Jewish religion. He was a scribe, a teacher, and probably a Pharisee.

Luke 10:25²⁵ “Teacher, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

It was a question many were asking. Eternal life does not mean life after death, but life in God’s kingdom, life under God’s kingly rule, in the age to come. Although he asks the question to test Jesus, he was not necessarily hostile. He uses the respectful title, *Teacher*. The lawyer is testing the credentials of one who claims to speak the mind of God. Jesus answers the question with a question. He directs the man back to his own area of expertise: the OT law, **what do you read there?** What is your understanding, your interpretation?” It is about loving God and loving neighbor. As he has asked, **what must I do**, he knows he has a responsibility for *doing* what the commandments say. Christianity is built on the best of Judaism. Jesus calls for no more than what is at the heart of God’s requirements for his people. When we look at the life of Jesus, we see these commandments being lived. Jesus had a passion for

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his Father. There was an intimacy between them. Jesus did nothing that was not the will of his Father. In the same way, we see Jesus associating with tax collectors and sinners; his life was lived in the service of others. The lawyer came up with the right answer: doing what the Scriptures say – love God with the whole of one’s being and love one’s neighbor in the way you love yourself, showing care and consideration. Right; do it. Knowing what is the right thing to do and doing it can be very different. Jesus challenges him, and us, to practice the way that leads to eternal life.

A QUESTION OF MERCY

Perhaps because Jesus is getting too personal, or perhaps because the lawyer was not sincere in the first place, he asks another question.

Luke 10:29 ²⁹Looking for a loophole, he asked, “And just how would you define ‘neighbor’?”

Remember, he was a lawyer! The only loophole he could see was to limit the demands of the law and thereby limit his own responsibility. Jesus told a story about a man on a lonely road who got beaten up. Jerusalem to Jericho is 17 miles. The road drops from 2500 feet above sea level to 800 feet below sea level. The old road, even more than the modern one, wound through rocky terrain which provided hiding places for robbers. It was a lonely road and the wounded man would not have held out much hope for help. But he was in luck! Two men made their way down that road. The first was a priest. Surely there would be help from the man of God. No, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. The Levite who, came by next also crossed over. The priest and the Levite were going *down* the road. They were going from Jerusalem to Jericho. To excuse them on the grounds that had they stopped to help the man and he had died they would have been ceremonially unclean and unable to perform their priestly duties, does not hold. The priest’s main duty was to offer sacrifice. The Levite assisted in the worship. Defilement by contact with a dead body only applied when they were carrying out their sacred duties. The fact they were going down means their duty was over and they were going away from Jerusalem. On their way *to* Jerusalem priests always travelled in groups. These were alone. Here is a man in desperate need. It is literally a matter of life and death and it might already be too late. The priest and the Levite do nothing. Twice hopes are raised. Twice they are dashed. And these are the good guys. They may be diligent in their duties, but they are totally lacking in mercy.

Your life is in danger. Without help you will die. You may be lying wounded by the side of the road. Maybe all your life has crashed around you. Your business has failed, your wife/husband has left you. Your children have died. Your health has failed. Help is on its way. The minister comes by. He has preached his heart out at the worship service. There had been a great response to the altar-call. He spent a long time counseling them. He is tired. He wants to get home. Can he be blamed when he hardly notices you? Then along comes a deacon. The deacon is more practical. He will help, surely. He has spent a long time with the treasurer convincing him that a new set of choir robes are essential. Then there was a difficult, but in the end profitable, meeting with the architect about the new fellowship hall. He, too, goes on his way. Here is someone else. Oh no! That teenage boy is on parole. He should not even be riding that motor-bike. He’s probably stolen it. He has probably never seen the inside of a church. But he is the one who stops, comes across to you. Hey, man, you look bad.

A QUESTION OF SACRIFICE

The Samaritan who came along the road and came over to the wounded man was a surprise. Unlike the Jewish priest and the Levite, this despised foreigner had pity. His heart went out to the victim and his compassion, his mercy was translated into sacrificial action. To make bandages for the man’s wounds, the Samaritan would have had to tear pieces of his own clothing.

He used his own wine as a disinfectant and his own oil as a soothing lotion. (Jeremias)

He got the man on to his own donkey. He paid for him at the inn out of his own pocket and he promised to pay more if it was needed.

Sadhu Sundar Singh and a companion were traveling through a pass high in the Himalayan Mountains. At one point they came across a body lying in the snow. Sundar Singh wished to stop and help the unfortunate man, but his companion refused, saying, “We shall lose our lives if we burden ourselves with him.” But Sundar Singh would not think of leaving the man to die in the ice and snow. As his companion bade him farewell, Sundar Singh lifted the poor traveler onto his back. With great exertion on his part, he bore the man onward, but gradually the heat from Sundar Singh’s body began to warm up the poor frozen fellow, and he revived. Soon both were walking together side by side. Catching up with his former companion, they found him dead—frozen by the cold. Sundar Singh was willing to lose his life on behalf of another, and in the process found it.