

“The Good Samaritan” would have to be one of the best-known Bible stories, although I don’t think it’s as well-known as what we think it is.

The phrase “Good Samaritan”, well that **is** well-known. It’s entrenched in our language, and so it gives the illusion that it’s a well-known parable. And so, “a person who does a good deed for a stranger who’s in trouble”, gets labelled as “a good Samaritan”....

But the actual story that Jesus told, has a depth to it that goes **way** beyond that understanding, and it would probably leave most people who engage with this story, feeling rather “uncomfortable”...

So, let’s unwrap it:

A Lawyer stood up, to put Jesus to the test. Now, another name for this type of “lawyer”, is a “Scribe” – These people are experts in the Religious Law (“The Law”) – They were experts in the Old Testament Scriptures (especially the first 5 books of the Bible: Genesis; Exodus; Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy – Bible Scholars refer to this section of the Bible as “The Pentateuch” (Penta=5) – but these 5 books were known as “The Law”)

And this Lawyer asks Jesus a question. Now, the thing is, he’s not wanting to learn – he’s not seeking information – he’s wanting to get the measure of Jesus... He wanted to gauge Jesus against his own learned wisdom. It seems like he was either looking for a “gotcha” moment (to catch Jesus out on – “You’re no good”),,, or he was seeing if Jesus' answer was

going to line up with **his** learned opinion, and therefore Jesus was OK...

But either way, he's putting Jesus to the test. This bloke, is precisely the sort of person Jesus was talking about only 4 verses earlier. And we talked about this last week: Jesus gave thanks to God: V21. "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

The Scribes/Lawyers – the experts of the law, were the epitome of “the learned/wise”... This is precisely the sort of person, that the wisdom of God (in the Lord Jesus Christ), is hidden from... Yes, they might know a lot **about** God's Law, but they were hopeless at applying their knowledge into practical Godliness...

Anyway, this Lawyer/scribe, he stands up, and he asks Jesus a question: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Now, I find that question really interesting. In the section we studied last week, Jesus has just told his Disciples (those who were **not** thought of as “wise” and “learned”), He's just told them, “Rejoice!, because your names are written in Heaven – it's been revealed to you, but hidden from the wise”.... In other words: “Your place is booked – your name is in the Lamb's Book of Life – you're headed for eternity...

And now we've got this expert in the law, asking "What do I have to do to get that?"

Now, I want you to see the contrast: Jesus has just explained it to His disciples that it is by the gracious will of God, that He reveals Himself to the lowly. It's by grace (you see). We can't "earn" eternal life. There's nothing we can do to gain eternal life – it's entirely by the grace of God... ... Unless you're perfect ...

Alright, so this is an expert in "The Law" – he's a Lawyer. So, Jesus asks him his take on the Law... You want to know how to gain eternal life, what does The Law say about it?

And the Lawyer actually gave a pretty good answer.
"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 neighbour as yourself."

And Jesus replied: **"You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."**

Now, the problem is, who can do that? This Lawyer (expert in the Law), he's failed in this already ... If you love God with every part of your being, with all your heart; soul; mind; strength..., you don't put the Son of God to the test... Are you with me???

You see, the problem we humans have, is most folk tend to judge themselves by their own standard, and they conclude that they (and their loved ones) are good people. But right here, is the standard, of what earns eternal life. And it begins with a total commitment of the whole person, to loving God...

Are you with me? *“I’m a good person – I do good stuff. God’s not going to hold it against me that God is very low down on my list of priorities”*... Do you see how crazy that mindset is??? The very first basic law, is **“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 if you haven’t done that, no eternal life for you...

You see, there are 2 epic “fails” here.

The first epic fail, is probably what’s more common today: To do good stuff for your neighbour (to be a Good Samaritan if you like), and to have the believe that that’s going to earn you enough points to get you to heaven... and have nothing to do with God.

The 2nd epic fail, is the religious fail. The Lawyer knew his stuff... And he even knew (at least to some extent), that his knowledge of God, had to be expressed with actions towards others – thus the 2nd command – to Love your neighbour as yourself...

But for him, it was a head-knowledge, and not a heart-felt relationship with God. He understood it as a need to do enough to get him over the line – to tick a box and say “Yep, I’ve achieved that.”

The second command was to love **your neighbour as yourself**

V²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

Alright, now this Lawyer is assuming something – he’s assuming that there’s such a thing as a non-neighbour... If I am to love my neighbour as “myself”, my neighbour must be much **like** myself...

And let’s not be too hard on him. Aren’t we like that? Who do you consider your neighbour? If you are to love your neighbour as yourself, who do you consider “your neighbour”?

Is it:

- the person who lives next door?
- your family;
- your extended family;
- your mates;
- your work colleagues;

- the people who are on the same social strata as what you are?

- the people who have the same morals as you do?
- those of the same nationality;
- those of the same religion
- those who have the same political views;

What defines a neighbour???

And in typical Jesus style, He didn't define the limits of where this bloke's neighbourhood begins and ends... What He did, was He showed the Lawyer, what it means for him to **be** a neighbour.

Righto, so here's the story:

A man is going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Now, apparently that's pretty wild country, with a descent of about 1000 metres – steep road; mountainous; craggy... The sort of place where bandits can hide, and strike out of nowhere. and they did.

The robbers attacked him; stripped him; beat him, and left him for dead...

Now, it just so happened, that a priest was going down that road, and when the priest saw him, he passed by on the other side...

Now, every time that I've heard this passage preached on, the preacher has supplied an excuse for the priest. They've explained that if the victim had blood on him, or especially if

he turned out to be dead, and the priest had touched him, well the priest would become ceremonially unclean, and so he wouldn't be able to serve God in the temple – at least not until he'd gone through the purification process again....

And all of this is true... But Jesus didn't say that. The whole point that Jesus is making here, is that this priest (who was supposed to be close to God), and knew stuff about God, did not keep the commandment, to love his neighbour as himself.

And as I read the Scriptures (particularly the prophets), I hear the groaning of God "I desire **mercy** rather than sacrifice"ⁱ... And if my religion is not something of personal, merciful actions, my religion is dead, and God hates it...

The next one who comes along is a Levite. That means he's descended from the tribe of Levi, and the Levites were set aside to serve in the Temple. But more than this, they were also fulfilling some of what we would now expect the Public Service to doⁱⁱ (officers; judges; gate-keepers; etc).

But this bloke, he does the same thing: Walking down the road; sees this bloke that's been left for dead; crosses over to the other side of the road, and continues on his way.

³³ But a Samaritan....., as he journeyed

Alright, the Samaritan is a long way from home – he lives in Samaria, and he's not even on the road that takes him home....

And the Samaritans and the Jews hated each other – we saw that a couple of weeks ago when a Samaritan village didn't welcome Jesus,,, and James and John thought it would be a good idea to call in a nuclear strike, “Jesus, should we call down fire from heaven to destroy them?”

Alright, so in the minds of those who would've heard this story, a Samaritan represents Godless evil...

Alright, so we've got the priest and the Levite, representing those close to God, and the Samaritan, a bloke who's far away from God...

The difference, is that when this Samaritan saw the man who'd been left for dead on the side of the road, he didn't cross to the other side of the road – he had compassion – he showed mercy...

“Mercy”, is showing empathy/compassion for a person who suffers affliction, that comes undeservedly upon them...

Alright, if a person spends all their money on drugs and alcohol, and they won't work for a living, it's their fault they don't have anything to eat.

But when a person falls ill, or when they've been attacked by thieves, and left for dead on the side of the road, it's not their fault, and “Mercy”ⁱⁱⁱ, is showing compassion for them...

And this Samaritan – he didn't just do the bare minimum – he went all-out, to look after the victim.

He didn't cross to the other side of the road – **He went to him**

Now, if you see a person in need, do you phone a friend? Phone 000, and that's your job done??? Or do you get involved???

Let me give you the equivalent of what this bloke did:

First, he did the job of a first-responder. And he emptied his first-aid kit doing the job. He **bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.**

And then he did the job of the ambulance. **he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn**

So, he was riding his own mule, but he put the victim on the mule, and walked him to the inn.

And there at the inn, he did the job of a doctor. He took care of him.

And then he did the job of Medicare. The next day, he took out 2 Denarii. Now, the commentaries tell me, that should have been enough to pay the inn-fees for about 24 days...

And then he indebted himself to see the victim through his rehab... He said: **'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'**

And that's what compassionate mercy does. It's not ticking the box by doing the bare minimum. It's an expression of that sort of love that God has for us – the sort of love that gives of itself, and it's so costly...

What did it cost the Samaritan?

It cost him:

- time;
- money;
- comfort;
- his security – he himself was in danger, every moment he spent by the side of the road;
- to get involved.....

And so Jesus says to the Lawyer: ³⁶ **Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?"**

And you know what? The Lawyer couldn't even bring himself to say, "The Samaritan"... ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy."

And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

What's the lesson? What do we take home from this???

You see, the humanist, or those who preach a 'social gospel', would say, the message is, to show mercy, and that's all that matters. ...

But then, a good reformed evangelical might say: No, the message is that none of us are good enough to receive eternal life – all we can do is trust in the grace and mercy of God...

Both of those attitudes head down the path of an epic fail.

The first one tries to earn salvation by doing good...

The second one, claims to know God, but it's all head-knowledge, and there's no relationship that spills over into loving with compassionate mercy, because that's what God does.

It's pretty much what James was saying, when he said

James 2:14-17 (ESV)

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith

save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

One of the great tragedies of our modern church, is we've made it all about faith,,,,, such that some would brand me a "heretic" for suggesting that what we do is also important....

You see, a true disciple of Jesus, not only believes in Jesus, but follows Jesus in all of His ways. And part of that, is being filled with Godly, loving compassionate mercy for our neighbour who is genuinely in need...

By the Holy Spirit, the closer we are to God, the more our hearts will be filled with the compassionate mercy of God.

Those two Old Testament commandments remain true today for Christians....

"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 neighbour as yourself."

How do we love our neighbour? It's not by setting boundaries on the neighbourhood – it's by **being** a neighbour – even to a stranger in need...

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus Christ,
we thank You
that we're not saved by doing good stuff,
but by Your gracious mercy.
It's not by wisdom we are saved,
but by Your revelation – in Your mercy
You choose to reveal yourself,
to people like us
(the undeserving).

And Lord we pray
that You would transform our hearts
to become a people after Your own heart.
That we would have hearts
of genuine compassion and mercy.

That we would give of ourselves
(no matter what it costs),
because that is how You are,
and that is what You did for us.

Lord, may we not
be those who are supposed to be close to God,

but cross to the other side of the road
to avoid the inconvenience of a person in need.

Help us to recognise genuine need,
and in the Name of Jesus,
to be a neighbour in that time of need.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.

ⁱ Hosea 6:6

ⁱⁱ Some were to be “officers and judges” (1 Chr. 23:4; cf. 26:29–32), gatekeepers (23:5; cf. 16:38, 42; 26:1–19), and musicians (23:5; cf. 16:41–42; ch. 25; 2 Chr. 8:14).

in Myers, A.C. (1987) *The Eerdmans Bible dictionary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

ⁱⁱⁱ It is “the emotion roused by contact with an affliction which comes undeservedly on someone else”

in H.-Esser, H. (1986) “Mercy, Compassion,” *New international dictionary of New Testament theology*. Edited by L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, and H. Bietenhard. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.