

I had just left Jerusalem and was on my way home to Jericho. I always enjoyed my time at the Temple to worship. I was looking forward to getting back home to my family, just not the walk home. 17 miles of treacherous terrain – dropping some 3,500 feet, and dangerous – robbers often hid in the caves and cliffs. I shouldn't have gone alone, but I wanted to get home.

As I walked through a narrow pass, 3 men jumped me ... one punched me, another knocked me down and the third kicked me while I was on the ground. I couldn't yell for help, no one was around. They took my money and tore my clothes off.

I'm not sure how long I laid there in and out of consciousness, but I do remember a priest coming by. He'll help me, I thought, he just came from the Temple. He glanced at me but crossed to the other side of the road and kept right on walking. A while later a Levite walked up and looked at me. I was relieved. I remember thinking this religious guy was at the Temple, too. But he took off as well.

The sun was setting. I couldn't get up. I thought I was done for when I saw a hazy image of a man on a donkey. I could tell he was a Samaritan by the way he dressed, and I thought, uh, oh. Our people hated him and his people hated me. My mind began to think of all the things he might do to me: spit on me, kick me, or finish me off.

I expected the worst as he jumped off his donkey, but as knelt down he disinfected my wounds with wine, soothed my sores with oil, and even tore some strips of his own clothes to make bandages. He put me on his donkey until we stopped at an inn. He stayed up all night to make sure I was ok. The next day he gave the innkeeper enough cash to cover food and lodging and care until he returned.

The “Good” Samaritan saved my life. Because of me, “Good” Samaritan, has become synonymous with care, compassion and kindness for those in need of help. You name hospitals after him. You even have “Good Samaritan Laws,” which protect a person from being sued when they stop to help an

injured person. Do you consider yourself a “Good” Samaritan? Have you had the opportunity to be a “Good” Samaritan? recently?

There are valuable truths in this familiar parable that we want to take home with us today. Let's find out what they are.

Today's Bible Story is introduced by this question from an expert in the law: **“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** Did you catch the contradiction in his question? Listen to it again: **“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** You don't *do* anything for an *inheritance*. It's a gift. This guy isn't here to listen and learn from Jesus. He's here to test and trip up Jesus.

As he often did, Jesus responds with a question of his own: **“What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”** Jesus marches him right back to Scripture. That's a great lesson for us. When people ask us questions, take them back to the Bible, to what God says, not to what you think or feel. The expert knew the law. He correctly quoted Deuteronomy 6: **“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 Leviticus 19: **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

And Jesus verbally patted him on the back for that: **“You have answered correctly.”** Then he went one step further: **“Do this and you will live.”** Is Jesus encouraging salvation by works? Do we earn our way to heaven? Absolutely not! We had this discussion last week. Scripture doesn't change. But if you attempted to follow the Law to leverage your way into heaven, then you'd have to love God with every fiber of your being (heart, soul, strength and mind) and your neighbor ... all day, every day. That's God's standard. Stumble with just one naughty word, thought or action and James says we've failed forever: **“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”**

Instead of asking: *“I haven't kept the law perfectly. What can I do?”* Well, you know lawyers, always

looking for loop holes, he asks instead: **“Who’s my neighbor?”**

This man wants Jesus to draw this teeny tiny circle around the term *“neighbor.”* But instead, Jesus uses a parable to draw a circle that is much, much bigger than he bargained for.

This parable was intended to show that my neighbor is more than the person that is close to me and convenient for me to care for. *Spoiler Alert:* My neighbor is anyone whose path I cross that has a need that I can meet.

That’s how we got the term *“Good” Samaritan.* The 3 people who came into contact with me after I was left-for-dead on the side of the road, represent 3 attitudes we show. *Are you a Good Samaritan?*

Attitude #1: “I don’t care!” The priest walked toward the injured individual, but never got close enough to find out what his situation was. Was he dead? Hurt? Taking a nap? But once he spotted him, he avoided him and got out of there in a hurry.

Are there people around you who could use your help? Have you covered your eyes and ears and pretended they weren’t there so you didn’t have to get your hands dirty and deal with their problems? Can you think of someone you’ve come across in the past week who could have used a helping hand, or an encouraging word? We’re like that priest when we pretend we don’t see them.

Attitude #2: “I don’t care enough!” The Levite walked up to and saw the injured man on the side of the road. He moves on without lifting a finger. I guess if you’re not going to help, it doesn’t hurt to stare and see how bad off the person is! We’re like the Levite when we care enough to see the need, but not enough to do anything about it.

Which seems worse to you? The priest or the Levite? They both came from God’s presence but somehow God’s presence never came along with them. We can sing: *“O Holy Spirit Enter In”* but not so far *“in”* that we’d have to help someone. We can sing: *“O God, My Faithful God”* in church, but then walk past someone in need, someone who was made in the image of God.

Seeing the people around you who are hurting – that’s easy to do. **Doing** something about it – that’s the hard part. James specifically spoke to this point: **“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes or daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well, keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?”**

Attitude #3: “I do care ... enough to help!” The persons we’d expect to be a neighbor and show mercy didn’t. The person we’d least expect was the only one who did. Not only did Jesus bring a Samaritan into the story, he made him the hero!

What’s Jesus teaching us? First of all: **he saw him ... be willing to pay attention.** We need to be aware of the people around us and their needs. We don’t have to be nosey, but let’s keep our eyes open and be good listeners! Too often we go through our own daily and weekly routines we forget about others. We don’t see our neighbor’s needs.

Secondly: **he took pity on him ... be willing to show sympathy or empathy.** What’s the difference? *Sympathy* ... you’ve had a shared experience – you lost your dad, too. *Empathy* ... your heart goes out to them, even if your dad is still alive. We need to soften our hearts to show more sympathy and empathy for others! The more time spent with Jesus, the more he softens and warms our stone-cold hearts. It’s easy to become calloused to the needs of our neighbor.

And thirdly: **he went to him ... be ready for action.** We need to take the time, to inconvenience ourselves, to step out of our comfort-zone, to put someone else’s needs ahead of our own! Are we willing to do whatever it takes to help our neighbor?

We will cross paths with people in need. Our neighbor may not look or talk, or act like us, but God has put them in our path. Maybe we’re thinking about him, or her, or them right now! We may not have or even need oil and bandages, but we can still be a *“Good” Samaritan!*