

Being the Good Samaritan in our World Today

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[0 : 0 0] Well, welcome to the next in our series on the parables of Jesus. It's great to have you with us. As I said, today is the parable of the Good Samaritan. And it's such a well-known story, it's turned into a phrase, you're such a Good Samaritan.

In fact, we've got a project at church called the Good Samaritan Project. And so we're going to have to dig a little bit deeper for it to have the same kind of impact it did for us today as it did for its original hearers.

And we know it asks some very profound questions about who we are. And what kind of actions we must take, what kind of people we're supposed to be. We don't normally think about this, who am I?

We just take it for granted. If you ask me, my name is Dylan, I'm a white guy, I'm a South African, I'm a Christian. And these things are just who we are, we take them for granted.

Would I be a different kind of person though if I wasn't white? Maybe if I was born in a black family. Especially in South Africa all those years ago. Is it any different for black families now?

[1 : 0 5] What if I was born a girl? How would my life be different? What kind of a person would I be? Now, obviously I'm not going to ask those questions in any deep, dark detail because that would be weird. But it is interesting to know that our identity and who we think of ourselves has a massive impact on who we think we are and how we act.

And today's parable kind of asks those same questions. We kind of have to get down to foundational level thinking about who we are as God's people and therefore how we're supposed to act.

Well, so let's go back all those years to when Jesus was walking on earth and speaking to people. And he had lots of interactions with different people. And we've got a glimpse into that today.

The parable doesn't start with a story out of the blue. It starts from a story with a context. And so let's have a look at that in some detail. But first we've got a lawyer asking Jesus some questions.

Now, this is not a normal lawyer like we know them. It's a lawyer in the law. He's a religious lawyer. And he was supposed to know the answers to these questions. And so there's a little bit of a sting.

[2 : 1 5] Why is he asking Jesus this question? Why is he even in his circle of disciples? Does he trust Jesus? He calls him teacher. But you can see that there's a comment that he wanted to test Jesus.

We've come across the lawyers before in Luke's gospel, and they're there to catch Jesus out. They don't trust him. In fact, they don't want him. In fact, in the end, they reject him. They're the ones that get him into trouble, along with the Pharisees.

And so there's a bit of a... We don't really trust this lawyer that's asking Jesus this question. If we were there in the crowd, we would have gone, Oh, here's a question. Okay. Why are you asking Jesus this question?

Jesus, what must I do to inherit eternal life? It's not a bad question. Those kind of questions were asked in those days. Now, just to know that he's not asking the same question that we evangelicals think he's asking.

He's not asking how to be saved. He's asking about inheriting eternal life. To ask about inheriting eternal life, look, he's a Jew already. He's already in God's covenant people.

[3 : 16] And so he's not asking about how to be saved. He's asking about how to make sure he kind of stays saved or how to make sure that he gets to enjoy all the benefits of being in God's kingdom at the resurrection and the inheritance of eternal life.

And so he's asking about how he needs to live. And Jesus gives a great answer. So we're sitting there. This lawyer barges in. He asks Jesus a question. And are we looking at Jesus?

What's he going to say? And Jesus gives a very good answer. He says, okay, I put the ball back in his court. What do you say? How do you read the law? How do you read the law? And so Jesus is asking a good question because he's asking about how to live.

And Jesus is in effect saying, look, you've got the law. You should know these answers. Why don't you just tell me what you think? Okay, now the tension is rising. Bit of a challenge back to the lawyer. So now we're going to look at the lawyer and ask him, what is he going to say?

And he gives the standard answer. Love the Lord your God. It's a quote from Deuteronomy from the Shema that they recite every day. The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

[4 : 21] And he quotes that. And love your neighbor as yourself. Now that's a quote from Leviticus 19. And we need to look at that in some detail because it's going to, really the whole parable, the whole story today, the story revolves around loving your neighbor.

And you'll see that in a second. So Leviticus 19 says this. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the Lord. Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart.

Rebuke your neighbor frankly, so you shall not share his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear grudge against anyone among your people. But love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

And Jesus says, okay, you've answered correctly. But then he lands a challenge. Do this and you will live. Now as a crowd, we're going, whoa.

Oh, he's throwing it back at the lawyer now. Okay, how is the lawyer going to respond? Now this is the same challenge, by the way, that God gives his people in the Old Testament.

[5 : 24] That section in Deuteronomy from the Shema about loving the Lord your God ends off with God saying, and if you are careful to obey this law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded, that will be our righteousness.

And that's where the catch is, that little word, complete obedience of all points of the law, all of the time. And Jesus is giving exactly the same challenge back to the lawyer.

Okay, you're right. Now do this and you will live. Okay, now looking back at the lawyer, what's he going to respond? But he wanted to justify himself.

And he asked Jesus, Oh, that's an interesting reply. Okay, what is he trying to get at here?

Now, again, we mustn't mix our evangelical thinking into the reply that he gave. Trying to justify himself here isn't so much trying to get saved again by works.

[6 : 27] He's trying to say why he's asking those questions. And essentially, what we'll find out just now, is that he's lowering the bar and trying to lower the standards of who he needs to show love to.

Who is his neighbor? And he's not asking out of a good place. Again, he's trying to justify himself. He's not asking a genuine question at all. And he's not even asking who he should love.

Rather, he's trying to find out who he shouldn't love or who he doesn't have to love. He's being sneaky. He's being pedantic. He's being a bit of a lawyer, to be honest. Trying to catch the lawmaker out.

Trying to get past his obligations to show love. And, you know, to be honest, I guess we've all done this in some way. Just think back to when we were a child and there were a bunch of cookies at your mom baked and put them in the jar.

And she says, Now, don't touch the jar. He said, Okay, I won't touch the jar. Meaning, don't eat the cookies. And I said, Okay. And then you get an implement. You scratch around in the drawers.

[7 : 27] Your mom's going after them. And you take her tongs. And you sneak it into the jar. Boom! You didn't touch the jar. And you eat all the cookies. And we think we're being very clever. And so, you know, we're very good at changing laws.

Changing what we're supposed to do to fit our own ends. And children do it. And adults are no different. Now, the question of who one's neighbor is was deeply debated at the time of Jesus by the Jews.

Especially because of that Leviticus passage. You know, it says this. Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor. In other words, your neighbor there is your fellow Israelite.

Do not seek revenge or bear grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. And so, the Jews just went slashed onto that.

Okay, great. Now we just need to know who to love. It's our neighbor. Now, who's our neighbor? Is it one next door to us or further down the road? But they didn't even debate about whether it was someone from the outside. Here are some commentators talking about this.

[8 : 34] One of them is called Ben Sirach. It's roughly just a few hundred years before Jesus. And he says this. Give to the devout, but do not help the sinner. Do good to the humble, but do not give to the ungodly.

Hold back their bread, and do not give to them. So, it doesn't sound like love just any of your neighbors. It sounds like there's a particular neighbor that you must love, and that's your Jewish neighbor. Another commentator, Rabbi Nathan, commenting on this passage in Leviticus, says this.

If someone acts as one of our people, then love him. But if he does not act as one of our people, you should not love him. And so, the answer seems to be pretty straightforward.

But they've conveniently forgotten something from that very same passage in Leviticus. It goes on to say this. When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them.

The foreigner residing among you must be treated as a native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. Now, I can imagine Jesus looking at them, giving the lawyer just a long, hard stare.

[9 : 46] What a sign, going, Oh, really? And that's when he tells the parable. And the parable brilliantly exposes the underlying assumptions and prejudices of the lawyer and obviously of his Jewish heroes as a whole.

So, he starts off, there's a man, presumably a Jewish person, going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. And you do go down because Jerusalem is so high up and Jericho is almost below sea level.

And it's a really difficult path. It's barren. It's in the hills. There's no one who lives here. So, it's always a dangerous path. And then he falls into trouble and he gets mugged and he's left for dead.

He's really badly beaten up. I think in South Africa we understand how that looks. And then these people arrive. And so, we pick up the action.

We meet two characters who represent the top level of Jewish religion. If anyone was going to do anything, it was going to be these two. One is a priest, the other a Levite.

[10 : 49] You know, both work in the temple and are considered representatives of their people. They represent what is best in Judaism. If anyone is going to do anything, we're going to follow their example because they give an example for everyone else to follow.

And the tangent is heightened as Jesus tells the story. He says this, A priest happened to be going down the same road and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

So, priest is arriving. He sees the man. A priest arrives. He sees the man. And then he's going to go around. And the crowd is like, Oh, man.

Why did he do that? And then Jesus says, A Levite, too. When he came to the place and saw him, the crowd is going to wonder what is he going to do.

Passed by on the other side. Oh, man. Now, why are they doing that? Well, there is a holiness code. You know, they weren't allowed to touch dead bodies. Although, in the law again, if someone's life was in danger, they were supposed to intervene and it supersedes any holiness codes that they've got.

[11 : 58] But again, they're conveniently forgetting that. They're applying some of the law, but not all of the law, to their convenience. And then, a Samaritan arrives on the scene.

And Jesus delivers a complete surprise. It's a totally unexpected character. The crowd would have looked at each other. Yes, Jesus says that. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was.

When he saw him, pity on him. So, when he said, oh, a Samaritan, maybe a Jew would have said, oh, don't worry about these Samaritans. We know them. This guy's in more trouble now that the Samaritan has arrived.

And then Jesus delivers another surprise. He had compassion on him. Now, you've got to understand the whole situation between Samaritans and Jews. They've got a long history of hating each other, dating way back to 500 BC, when the northern Israelite tribes were sent off into exile.

Some Israelites were left and the king of Assyria populated that part of Israel, the northern part of Israel, with other tribes, probably from Babylon in those areas.

[13 : 03] And they intermarried with the remaining Jews and they became Samaritans. And of course, they introduced their sort of syncretistic worship. And the northern Israelite tribes, you know, they were always in battle with the southern tribes anyway because of where they were supposed to be worshipping and they were supposed to have one king.

And now they compound that by marrying foreigners and by having mixed worship. And then that just continues to spread, to play out in history.

And there's backwards and forwards and fighting between the Jewish tribes that came back from their exile after Babylon. And when they got there, they wanted to rebuild the temple and the Samaritans got involved and tried to trick them.

You can read about that in Ezra and Nehemiah. And eventually, the Jews got so upset that they had a war and they burnt down the temples of the Samaritans in Gerizim and Shechem, the two big temples that they had.

And then, just after Jesus was born, in the early century AD, the Samaritans got their revenge by scattering the bones of dead people in the temple precinct that had just been rebuilt by Herod.

[14 : 12] And so there was really bad blood. And they would have remembered that Jesus' hearers would have known and known what was going on. So when he introduces the Samaritan, you could almost hear the hisses and the boos.

What is he doing here and what is he going to do? And then, surprise, surprise, not the Levite, not the priest, but the Samaritan has compassion. Now, that little word, compassion, is an interesting Greek word.

I'll put it on the screen for you and no one really knows how to pronounce it, but egg splunkingthe is perhaps the best way or maybe not the best way. But, funny enough, we get the English word spleen from it.

But what it means is it means to be deeply moved on the inside, to have your bowels sort of changed and rearranged and, you know, that gut feeling you get when you see something that is wrong or bad or that you've got to fix something really wrong and you just have that gut instinct that's, no, and then it moves you to do something.

But interesting enough, it's about having an internal feeling, a strong feeling of something that needs to be fixed and you feel compassion or pity and it then moves you to take action.

[15 : 36] And then he does. I mean, he goes way out of his way to help this person. He went to him, he bandaged his wounds, he poured on oil and wine, he put him on his own donkey and he took him to the inn and then he gives him two weeks of board and lodging and says, charge it to my account.

Anything that's left over, charge it to my account. And you know, it was dangerous for him to do that, you know, the people were still there that could have robbed him. Now this is, the crowd would have sat stunned silence. A Samaritan did all of that.

In our one world, you know, coming from America, the Black Lives Movement, that's like saying, we could be telling you the story of the good white cop because, you know, there's no good white cops anymore.

Or if you were telling the story in apartheid South Africa, it would be the story of the good black man. And all the Africaners would have been like, no, but that can't be right. Or maybe in the modern South Africa, it's the story of the good white boor.

And so Jesus is challenging their preconceptions about race and ethnicity and how we to act and react towards each other.

[16 : 44] And into the stunned silence, Jesus poses a peach of a question. He turns to the lawyer. Which of these do you think proved to be a neighbor?

Oh, the crowd watching this. Oh, this is getting more interesting. Looks over to the lawyer. And you know, he can't even say the word Samaritan. Almost through gritted teeth.

Ah, the one who had mercy on him. Oh, the crowd knows he's been caught out. Jesus has caught him out. And the crowd looks back at Jesus.

How is he going to end this? Right. Go. And do the same. Boom. Mic drop. Crowd goes crazy. Wah! Ah, this guy got caught out in his own trap and Jesus totally turned the table on him.

Right. Well, that's how the story goes. How are we supposed to understand it and how are we supposed to apply it then? Well, the lawyer wants to know who he should or should not show mercy to.

[17 : 47] And Jesus simply turns the whole question on its head. And in fact, to ask the question is to miss the point entirely. Showing mercy has nothing to do with ethnic or religious boundaries or boundary markers.

Knowing who one should show or not show mercy to. But rather, if we count ourselves as belonging to God's people, showing mercy to those who are not considered on the inside should become our boundary marker.

So our boundary marker is not that we show mercy to ourselves, to those inside the covenant, but our boundary marker is marked out by us showing mercy to those not inside the covenant.

Now this, of course, will have profound lessons for us today. And Jesus is teaching us about who we are as his people and how we should act.

It tells us about our identity and that that identity should inform our actions. So, let's spend a few minutes with that. Who we are must define how we live.

[18 : 55] Who we are must define how we live. For the Jews to be Jewish was to be defined by the law. What you got by the New Testament is Jesus saying that's not good enough.

We don't want that anymore. You can't pick and choose which law is you going to uphold. We need a whole new system of law keeping.

And the reason for that is the Jews never really wanted to keep the law in the first place. Although they were given the law, they never lived up to it and they never wanted to live up to it. You've got the Hosea 6 passage telling you exactly that and that's centuries after the giving of the law.

God gave them so much space to learn how to be obedient to the law and they never got it down to the time of Jesus. In fact, the ones who are supposed to be keeping the law and following God and wanting righteousness reject the very person God has sent them to teach them how to do it.

And the reason for that is they'd prefer to hold on to the ethnic identity markers. They want to be Jewish and they don't want anyone else to come in. And God is saying, no, the time has come for us to change that.

[20 : 02] So my people are going to look different from now on and I want them to act different as well. In fact, if the Jews had kept the law as God intended, they wouldn't be asking who is my neighbor.

It just wouldn't matter. And Jesus is making a stinging comment on the low level of Jewish obedience to the law. Look, he's saying, even the Samaritan keeps the law better than you guys.

But how are God's people supposed to react? Who are we now? Well, because of Christ's arrival into the world and because of his death and because of his resurrection, he gives us an ultimate example and the power to live the life of the kind of people that God wants.

And so there's been a very sharp change in human history because of the arrival of Christ. His ultimate example by dying on the cross and not just that, but because he's the Lord of heaven and earth and he's got the power of the Holy Spirit at his command, he pours out the Holy Spirit into the hearts and minds of his people so that questions, small questions of who we should love doesn't actually become an issue because we can call on the love that God has poured out into our hearts because we've seen it.

God has shown love to complete outsiders, people who completely don't deserve it, meaning us, the Gentiles. Look, the Jews don't deserve it either, but of course, by that time, they thought they had. And because God has shown love to outsiders and compassion and mercy to us, it's much easier for us to show it to others.

[21 : 35] who we are must define how we live because we are God's people and because he's defined us differently now from the past, the new covenant of Christ's love and of his example of the cross and of his pouring out of the Holy Spirit to enable us to live like he wants us to live, not to live to ourselves but to live for him and his glory and to live for others, we've got the power to do that now means that there's been a massive change in human history.

God has the people that he's always wanted to have, the people who are doing these things. But there's a challenge to us on that. We mustn't take being God's people for granted like the Jews did.

So they would much rather stand on their identity as a Jewish person and then define who they're supposed to love and not love. We mustn't be people like that. No matter how long we've been Christians, maybe for generations in our families, we can't define ourselves, oh, I'm a Christian so I must decide who I'm going to love or not.

No, no, no. We always only become Christians because God's love broke down boundaries. He reached out to us who don't deserve it and pulled us in. And so our job is to do the same kind of thing that God has done for us.

And then secondly, who we are must not define who we love. Who we are must not define who we love. The parable is intended to show that love doesn't allow limits on the definition of neighbor.

[23 : 06] Being the neighbor that God wants you to be doesn't mean you need to don't even ask the question who must I love or who shouldn't I love. One commentator says, one cannot define one's neighbor.

One can only be a neighbor. Now, while nearness and need, you know, if we see someone close and they need something, we can help them.

that tells us who our neighbor is, but it doesn't make us go and do it. No, we need something that compels us to go and do that. We need a powerful love or a power of something from somewhere outside of ourselves of being told what to do.

You know, the Jews have been told this, other cultures have been told this, everyone in one shape or form believes in the golden rule. Not quite the same as Judaism as Christianity, but they never had the power to carry it out.

There's no institution that does that except for Christians. And the reason is we've had an ultimate example in the death and resurrection of Christ as well as the power to do it by His Holy Spirit.

[24 : 15] So where do we get our experience of change from? From Christ Himself. Jesus wants people who are moved to compassion because they have been moved by compassion.

Jesus wants people who are moved to compassion because He's got people who have been changed by compassion. Now compassion here does mean sympathy and feeling towards, but it's not just that.

It starts there, it starts as a feeling, but it ends in action. So compassion and mercy are the same, kind of like the same thing, although mercy starts in compassion.

That little word compassion is scattered throughout Luke, some very important places for us to pick up. In Luke chapter 1, in those early chapters of Luke, in the Benedictus and the Magnificat, the passages we often look at, and especially over Christmas time, in Luke 1, 78, God is moved to forgive and to save and says, because of the tender mercy of our God.

And that little word tender is that Greek word, the spleen word. later on in the Gospel of Luke, in chapter 7, he sees the woman of Nain and her dead son, and it says he is moved to compassion.

[25 : 31] He feels it in his spleen again, that spleen word. And then again, in Luke chapter 15, with the parable of the prodigal son, the father is moved when the son comes back and he runs out to meet him.

And that's that compassion word again, deeply moved on his inside. And that's why God, that's the base root of why God does what he does.

When he sees people that need help, it just grates him, it just gets him. He's a God who is just moved to pity. And thank God for that, because otherwise none of us would be in his kingdom.

So we mustn't think of God as distant and not caring. He loves and cares and he sees things that really grate him and bother him. And so he takes action in Jesus Christ to change it. And then he gets us into the kingdom and then he moves us to take action on Jesus' behalf.

Now the Bible wants us to take action. This is a parable about taking action. The Bible consistently warns us about claiming to love God, but then not having any actions to show it.

[26 : 46] We mustn't buy into this thing of you must love God and we're not saved by our works. Now we're not saved by our works. But again that's an evangelical division that the Bible doesn't make.

It says if you love God, you should automatically do the things that God wants you to do without asking questions of bringing things lower and smaller and defining terms. Who you are determines what you do.

So that what you do and how you act speaks far more about who you are, what you claim. Actions speak louder than words. And so for us as Christians, let's not say that we love God and not do anything about it and not be moved by compassion when we see people in need, especially people who don't belong to us or what we think belong to our tribe, so to speak.

It's not a question of earning salvation, it's a question of being an identity. It's not a question of whether we should take action. We are going to take action.

We do act. The question is from which identity are we going to take action? Christianity is a relational religion. It's not a mystical one. We're not called to withdraw and be spiritual and only contemplate our relationship with God.

[27 : 58] We are called to engage, to help, and to change. We do not relate to God only on our own. We do it through how we relate to others, because it is God who enables us to love our neighbor as we should.

God calls us to see others like the Samaritan, and then to feel compassion, to go over, to be with that person, and then to take sacrificial action, to make sure that people are helped, and by that to show love.

So mercy and love are the same thing. Mercy is just acting out from compassion, and love is the same thing as showing love. God's compassion, and this comes out of us receiving compassion from God.

God's compassion, aren't we thankful? God's compassion didn't stop to ask silly questions like who should be receiving it. Imagine he had asked that, who deserves my love? No one. Well, then you're not going to get it.

Just go and do it. Who proved to be the neighbor? The one who showed mercy? Okay, then, go and do likewise, Jesus is telling us.

[29 : 11] Life and death of Christ includes us into his covenant. We have experienced God's gracious mercy directly, and that changes us. We were his enemies. He reached out, broke those boundaries down.

He wasn't going to let ethnic boundaries stop him, or historic precedents dictate to whom he was going to show love. God loved the unlovable, and how can we do any different?

Now, how we do that, there's a million ways to do that. As long as you operate from a place of knowing that you are God's child, that you belong to him, you're one of his people, and he wants you to act in a certain way, and not bother with small silly little questions.

Be magnanimous. Be as compassionate with others as God was compassionate with you. And then all kinds of opportunities will open up. Obviously, we're running the Good Samaritan Project. There's many opportunities to serve, but get stuck in.

Be compassionate and loving, and don't rest on our laurels that, oh, God loves us, that's okay. Yes, but we're supposed to love others, and others are only going to see us or know us as much as we reach out and love them as God has done that for us.

[30 : 21] Well, let's end our time in prayer and ask God to help us do these things. God, Heavenly Father, thank you for a great reminder of your compassionate love for us, and thank you that you broke down all the barriers and didn't just come to love your people on earth as you'd call them the Jews, but broke those boundaries down and spread your love to everyone on earth.

Lord God, we long to be the people that you want us to be and to spread as much compassion as you've given us. Lord, give us the Holy Spirit and the strength and the drive and to do that as well as the sight to see what needs doing and then to take action and make changes.

Help us in all these things to build your kingdom and to honour and glorify your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.