

THE PASSERS-BY

Luke 10:25-37

A certain man who was versed in the law of Moses thought that he could ask Christ a catch question and get Him to say something which would impair His influence. His query question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?", revealed the man's ignorance in supposing that eternal life could be inherited or secured by something that he himself could do. Even to this day every false religion has had its followers seeking to obtain eternal life on the basis of what they are or by what they do. That is Satan's masterpiece of delusion by which he keeps souls from trusting Christ as their Saviour.

Even though Christ knew the motive of the lawyer, He did not evade his question. He directed him to do what the law commanded. Of course, his sinful condition precluded the possibility of doing what the law required. Convicted of his guilt, but wanting to justify himself he asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Christ did not tell him. After all, it was not a question of who his neighbor was. The matter of chief concern was whether or not he was a neighbor. In reply to the lawyer's query our Lord related the well-known and unforgettable story of the man who was beaten by the robbers on the highway, and later was rescued from the ditch by the Good Samaritan.

The scene is laid on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jerusalem, the city of safety and blessing, was on the mountain. Within the walls of this most important city was the temple of the living God. There the Lord met with His people in a special way. Nowhere else did the people feel that they were closer to God. On the other hand, Jericho, the heathen town was down in the valley. It had long been known for its wickedness.

This man about whom Christ spoke was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was leaving the city of God and the fellowship of God's people to go to a place that had been cursed. Like so many today he was making his way "down." He kept going "down" until he "fell."

As one leaves the cool air of the city of Jerusalem on his journey to Jericho, a complete change in scenery occurs. The winding road is four thousand feet down, through mountains that are denuded of all vegetation. Huge rock jut out from the under strata. This road was very dangerous because it was infested with robbers and bandits.

As a man was going along this highway, an unrevealed number of bandits sprang out from behind the rocks, swooped on him, struck him to the ground, beat him until he was almost dead, stripped the clothes from his body, robbed him of all he had, and left him lying in the ditch by the roadside.

We do not know very much about the man who was wounded and nearly killed; whether he was young or old, ignorant or educated, poor or rich. What a spectacle of distress and misery! What proof of the cruelty and ferocity of the depraved hearts of men! Of what vileness men are capable! In some respects they are more to be dreaded than the beasts of prey that roam in the forest.

This nameless casualty on life's highway was a type of all who are wounded and robbed. Of course, all of us are not wounded in the same fashion. Some are wounded economically. Others are wounded physically, for their health has given way to sickness. Still others are wounded in their self-respect, for something has happened that has humiliated them and lowered their

morale. Some are wounded in their affections, and there is a loneliness where there was formerly a companionship. Many are wounded spiritually. There are those whose wounds are evident, but many have wounds that are hidden. Life itself carries with it the possibility of being hurt.

To any who may be wounded three things should be said:

1. You are not killed.

You still have life and as long as there is life there is hope. Concentrate on your possibilities instead of your problems. James Gordon Gilkey related the story of the American submarine named the Squalus. One morning in May 1939 she went to sea to make some practice dives. Something went wrong and it plunged to the bottom in 240 feet of water. Of the fifty-nine men on board twenty-six were killed and the others barely escaped. What a dismal ending for that ship's career!

But that was not the end. The ship was also salvaged and repaired and renamed the Sailfish. When World War II began, she was sent to the Pacific and the official story stated, "One night the Sailfish battled darkness, a typhoon, colossal waves and torrential rains to stalk and finally sink one of Japan's 22,000-ton aircraft-carriers. For this victory the Commander of the Sailfish was awarded the Navy Cross, and the Sailfish was awarded a Presidential Citation." Think about that! The ship that lay disabled and helpless at the bottom of the sea had now become one of the proudest of the fleet.

The tragedy in life is not the wound because that is inevitable. The tragedy comes when one quits instead of coming back. There are times when we must grit our teeth and say, "I may be down but I am not out." George Washington fought nine major battles. He lost six of the nine but he kept coming back until the war was won.

2. You can count on receiving help.

Often it is help which you did not expect. Help for the wounded man in our scriptural story might have been expected from the priest and the Levite, but it was not forthcoming. His help came from the Samaritan, a source that was not expected.

3. Don't let any wound make you bitter.

Christ said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

The number of the robbers is not given, but there were enough of them to do the job. On the lookout for somebody to rob, at an unexpected moment they pounded upon their victim and did their gruesome job. They beat him into insensibility, stripped him of everything and left him without caring what happened to him thereafter.

Those who wound and rob are divided into two groups. There are those who wound aggressively as did the bandits mentioned in our scripture lesson. There are also those who wound passively. Instead of breaking heads with clubs, they break hearts with neglect. Like the former group, they think first of themselves. There isn't anything more revealing than what we do when we come face to face with human need when nobody except God is looking at us.

A priest was the first person to come down the road to the place where the robbed man lay. Sympathy for and interest in humanity had dried up in his heart. Upon observing the wounded man, the priest was careful not to go near him. He neither stopped, nor spoke of him, but stepped over to the other side of the road and passed him by, leaving the man in his misery and helplessness without rendering any assistance whatever. The priest keenly knew that it was his duty to help the wounded man but, instead of doing so, he just passed him by, without saying anything to or doing anything for him. Perhaps the priest found it easy to rationalize in this fashion, "I did not wound him, or rob him, or throw him into the ditch. This is none of my business. He got himself into these circumstances, so why should I worry with him? I don't want to get involved. Anyway, if I pass him by, somebody else will come down the road and look after this fellow." People are experts in passing on their obligations to others.

Then another man came down the road to the place where the wounded man was lying in the ditch. He, too, was a religious man and was going to Jericho, perhaps looking for peace of mind. Likely this layman was tired of the noise in the city, his nerves were on edge, he had come to be irritable, and he was longing for the cool shade of the palm trees in and around Jericho.

At least the Levite did better than the priest, for he stopped and, with an attitude of sheer curiosity he gazed at the wounded man and then passed on down the road. The Levite was a splendid type of those who want to know, but do not want to help. They voluntarily offer plenty of advice and criticism, but refuse to render any help or support.

The priest and the Levite passed by because that was the easiest thing to do. They saved themselves some time and trouble. It is never pleasant to bind up wounds or to witness suffering. To pass him by was the least expensive thing which they could have done.

Doubtless they were able to actively manufacture various excuses for not helping the wounded man. Can you hear one or other of them saying: "He is a stranger. Maybe he deserved what he got. There is no chance for his recovery. I am not responsible for his plight anyway. I am in a hurry to get home. I have more important work to do. This is a dangerous section and it isn't safe to linger here. I need my money for other things. Somebody else who is better able to help him will come along. He might die on my hands and that would involve me in endless trouble."

A man for a poor and unworthy family was brought to a hospital in a Kentucky town one Sunday afternoon with a broken leg. A crowd gathered around the car. The doctor knew that nothing would be collected from the family, so he refused to admit the patient to his hospital. The crowd became very critical, so he suggested to the assembled critics that he would gladly admit the patient, set the limb, provide all necessary medicines and treatment, if they would pay for the nursing. He passed around the hat to collect the necessary funds, but the crowd dispersed at once without making a single contribution.

The third man who approached the wounded victim was an unnamed Samaritan, a half-breed, neither Jew nor Gentile, To a Jew a Samaritan was on the level with a dog. He would not sit at the same table with him. Brutal is not too strong a word to describe a Jew's treatment of a Samaritan. So bitter was his hatred that if the shadow of a Samaritan fell upon a Jew the latter at once went home and took a bath.

As soon as the Samaritan saw the poor unfortunate man, "he had compassion on him." His first impulse was to do something to help him. Alighting from his donkey, he immediately began to do all he could to save the life of the man who was nearly gone. For an anti-septic he poured wine on the wounds. Then he used oil for soothing and healing. Since the man was unable to walk, the Samaritan lifted him into his own saddle. Then he trudged alongside the donkey until they reached an inn, which was a place where one could find shelter and nourishment. He gave the man the personal care which he needed, stayed with him as long as was necessary, made provision for his future care and promised to pay the bill, whatever it might be.

When love finds a need, it seeks to supply it. It ministers to the needy, feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, gives drink to the thirsty, visits the sick, led the blind and comforts the sorrowing. Love forgets self and sacrifices for others. Loving service is never a burden. A little girl was carrying her brother on her back. Somebody asked her, "Isn't he heavy?" "No," she replied brightly, "he's my brother!" Where there is brotherly love, service becomes a source of joy.

This Samaritan could have left the man to die and perhaps no one would have ever known that he had so much as seen him. Instead of doing that, he translated his religion into life, which is something that is exceedingly important. When Kagawa visited Duke University some years ago, a correspondent of the Christian Herald interviewed him. Among various things which he said was this: "Here in America, you have more preaching and less action than in any country I ever saw." That, in part, explains the weakness and ineffectiveness of the religion of so many today.

Christ asked the lawyer which one of the men acted like a neighbor to the wounded man. He answered correctly by saying, "The one who took pity on him." Our Lord then said to him, "Go on, and keep on doing likewise." Thus we are taught that the cultivation of this neighborly spirit is the duty of all. Do not rush headling past your duty. Step on your road, and lift up your fallen fellowman. This is your Christian duty.

In closing let me appeal to you not to adopt the philosophy of the robbers which was, "What is yours is mine if I can take it," or the philosophy of the inn-keeper which was, "What is mine is yours if you pay me for it," or the philosophy of the priest and Levite which was, "What is mine is mine, and I intend to keep it for myself," but to adopt the philosophy of the Good Samaritan which was, "What is mine is yours if you need it."

"When I have time, so many things I'll do,
To make life happier and more fair
For those whose lives are crowded now with care;
I'll help to lift them from their low despair —
When I have time!"

"Now is the time! Ah, friend, no longer wait
To scatter loving smiles and words of cheer,
To those whose lives are now so dear;
They may not need you in the coming year:
Now is the time!"