

ON LIFE'S HIGHWAY

Luke 10:25-37

Time and again questions were asked Christ in an effort to ensnare Him or to induce Him to say something that would afford His enemies an opportunity to cripple His influence. On one occasion a certain man, who was versed in the law of Moses and an exponent of it, presumed to test Christ with a catch question. He said, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" That question from him was truly astounding. The law of inheritance is never operative on the ground of doing. The lawyer's question revealed his ignorance in supposing that eternal life could be secured by something that he himself could do. Every false religion today has its followers seeking to obtain eternal life by what they are or by what they do. That is Satan's masterpiece of delusion by which he keeps souls from trusting Christ as Saviour.

Man is so everlastingly proud and conceited that he thinks he must work for everything he gets, including entrance into heaven. Multitudes today have never come to realize that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God. In God's sight the works of sinners are but as filthy rags. In spite of this fact, multitudes are still trying to work their way into heaven, when the Word of God clearly states that salvation is by grace through faith, and not of works. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Even though Christ knew the motive of the lawyer, He did not evade his question. He directed him to do what the law commanded. It said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." Christ said, "This do, and thou shalt live." But note that one was required to do it, and not just to talk about it. Of course, man's sinful condition precluded the possibility of doing what the law required.

Convicted of his guilt, but wanting to justify himself, the lawyer raised a question as to the meaning of a word. 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, but later was rescued from the ditch by the Good Samaritan.

The scene was laid on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jerusalem, the city of safety and blessing, was on the mountain. It was by far the most important city in the land. Within its walls 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. It was the first town that the Israelites destroyed after they set foot on the promised land. Before leaving the place Joshua cursed it and pronounced judgment upon anybody who would rebuild it.

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. He, like so many today, was making his way "down." He kept going "down" until he "fell."

The road between Jerusalem and Jericho was very dangerous because it was infested with robbers and bandits. As this man was going along this highway, robbers sprang out from behind the rocks and seized him. These highwaymen beat him until he was almost dead, stripped the clothes from his body, robbed him and left him lying in the ditch. He lost everything except his life. In his wretched condition the wounded, suffering and helpless man could do nothing but wait for the compassion of some loving heart and the kindly touch of some neighborly hand.

I. The Wounded

We do not know very much about the man who was wounded and very nearly killed; whether he was young or old, educated or ignorant, rich or poor. As he was going along the dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho, some bandits swooped on him, struck him to the ground, stripped him of all he had and left him unconscious by the roadside. What a spectacle of distress and misery! What a proof of the cruelty and ferocity of the depraved heart of man! Of what vileness men are capable! In some respects they are more to be dreaded than the beasts of prey that roam in the forests.

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 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 herself was given 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).

II. The Robbers

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.

III. The Unconcerned.

A priest was the first person on the scene after the tragedy. As a representative of the law, he stood for the finest and best that the law could produce. Having become professional, sympathy for and interest in humanity had dried up in his heart. Upon observing the wounded man, he was careful not to go near him. He stepped over to the other side of the road and went on his way, leaving the man in his misery and helplessness without any assistance whatever.

A Levite was the next person to come to the place where the man was lying in the ditch. With an attitude of sheer curiosity he looked at him and 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 criticism and advice, 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 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."

It has always been true that people who do not have a willingness to help always have an excuse for not doing so. If they do not have an excuse, it is no trouble for them to manufacture one.

IV. The Rescuer.

The third man who approached the wounded victim was an unnamed Samaritan. 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." Instead of saying, "This man would rather perish than have me to touch him," the Samaritan laid aside a prejudice in favor of a foe. Prejudice is a child of the devil and should not have any place in the heart of a child of God. When he observed the wounded man in the ditch all the old hatred was forgotten. His first impulse was to do something to help him. He was willing to leave his own safety to God while he went to rescue the perishing.

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 antiseptic 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, leads 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 practiced his religion on the lonely, robber-infested road to Jericho, where and when God only saw him. He 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. To see in every needy person a neighbor and to do something for him is to please Christ, Who has saved us and Who will save all who trust Him.