

CHRIST'S EXAMPLE OF A GOOD NEIGHBOR

Luke 10:25-37

Many efforts were made to induce Christ to say something that would afford His enemies an opportunity to cripple His influence. Time and again questions were asked Him in an effort to ensnare Him in some manner.

A certain lawyer thought that he could entrap Christ at some point of the law. The term "lawyer" here means one versed in and an exponent of the law of Moses. Hence a lawyer in those days was more like a theologian than a present-day attorney. This particular lawyer presumed to test our Lord with a catch question, which revealed his own condition, although the questioner was not aware of this fact. He was not really desirous of information, but rather of testing Christ. His query revealed his ignorance, in supposing that eternal life could be secured by something that he himself could do; it showed his pride, by intimating that he could do whatever might be demanded; it manifested his legalism, by implying he was ready to do if he only knew what to do; it contained a fatal admission, the confession that he did not have eternal life; and it uncovered his selfishness, the desire to have something merely for his own gratification.

Man is so everlastingly proud and conceited that he thinks that he must work for everything he gets, including entrance into heaven. Multitudes are trying to work their way into heaven, when the scriptures indicate clearly that salvation is by grace through faith, not by 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 sent him to the law, the field with which he was familiar. Since he asked what he should do to inherit eternal life, Christ directed him to do what the law commanded. In response to Christ's question, "What is written in the law?", the lawyer gave Him what the Jews regarded as the summary of the whole law. He 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." Then, Christ said, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." But note that one must do it, and not just talk about it. He must keep the whole law, "for whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all." Thus he was brought to see that if he were to get eternal life, it could not be by anything he could do.

The lawyer declared that the entire content of the law was embraced in love to God and man. But the point is that no man has yet had or can have such love. His sinful condition precludes its possibility. Man's failure to measure up to this requirement is his condemnation. Feeling keenly this thrust, the lawyer was defeated on his own grounds and convicted of guilt. Lawyerlike he sought to get off by raising a question as to the meaning of words.

Wanting to justify himself, the lawyer said, "And who is my neighbor?" Christ did not tell him. The point in His answer is this: The question is not who your neighbor is, but are you a neighbor?

What a medley of characters is presented in this passage of Scripture! There are the robbers, a wounded man, an inn-keeper, a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan. They had very little in common. Only an accident or an outrage could have brought such a cluster together.

The scene was laid on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jerusalem, the city of safety and blessing, was up on the mountain and Jericho, the heathen town, was down in the valley. The road between them was very dangerous because it was infested with robbers. Christ told the lawyer that a certain man was going along this road when 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 wounded and suffering. He lost everything but life. In his wretched condition the helpless man could do nothing but wait for the compassion of some loving heart and the kindly touch of some neighborly hand.

Those who beat up and robbed the man are types of those who live and fatten on the spoils of others. They may be grouped under two heads--moral robbers and commercial robbers. In the first group are all those whose influence tends to lower the moral standards of the community. Every life whose influence tends to make it harder to be virtuous and easier to be vicious is a moral robber. There are lots of people who are out to get all the money they can. They will provide opportunities for you to gamble it over to them. They will provide opportunities for you to turn your money into drink. They will provide opportunities for you to live an immoral life, provided it puts money in their pockets. All of these have one thing in common--they are after your money, regardless of what effect it may have upon you.

The wounded wayfarer is a type of all those who are robbed. In a very real sense people are not born equal. There are children who come into this world who were robbed before they were born. The physical health, the moral heredity, and the helpful environment that should be theirs were squandered by their parents. Of course, such robbery is never justified.

It so happened that a priest was going from Jerusalem to Jericho after attending the services in the Temple. This prominent and influential religious teacher and leader saw the wounded man lying on the roadside. He was a professional priest. Real interest in and sympathy for humanity had dried up in his heart. Having observed the wounded man, the priest was careful not to go near him. After a moment's inspection, with an attitude of perfect indifference toward the unfortunate and helpless man, he stepped over to the other side of the road and passed on. Perhaps he reasoned thus with himself, "I did not rob him or wound 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? Anyway, a Levite is coming down the road and, if I pass on, he will look after this fellow." People are experts in passing on their obligations to others.

A Levite also came down to the place where the wounded man was lying on the roadside. He did a little better than the priest, for he went where the wounded man was lying. Being self-absorbed and unwilling to be troubled by the plight of a stranger, with an attitude of sheer curiosity he looked at him and then passed on down the road. The Levite is a type of those who want to know, but do not want to help. They cheerfully and voluntarily offer plenty of advice and criticism, but refuse to render any support. A man from 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 priest and the Levite passed by on the other side because that was the easiest thing to do. They saved themselves a lot of time and trouble. It was also the most pleasant side. It is never pleasant to bind up wounds or to witness suffering and trouble. It was also the least expensive thing for them to do. It costs something to relieve suffering and need.

When the priest and the Levite saw that wounded man by the roadside, and passed by on the other side without giving him any aid, doubtless they were able to manufacture various excuses for not helping him. In my imagination I can hear 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. I am

too tired to stop and bother with him. This is a dangerous section and it isn't safe to linger here. I need my money for other things. Somebody else better able to help him will come along. Somebody else who has more time can care for him. He might die on my hands and that would involve me in endless trouble."

I have learned long since that people who do not have a willingness to help always have an excuse for not doing so, and if they do not have one, it isn't any trouble for them to manufacture one. The fact of the matter is that we are so much like the priest and the Levite that we are not justified in criticizing them harshly.

Then we see another man approaching. This time it is a 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.

When this Samaritan's beast came upon the wounded man it stopped and snorted with fear at the smell of blood, whereupon the rider looked and saw the cause. As soon as he 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 the child of the devil and should not be given a place in any heart and life. When he observed the unfortunate fellow on the roadside all the old hatred was forgotten. Upon seeing a human being in trouble, his first impulse was to do something to help him. He laid aside his own safety for the sake of the wounded man. For a Samaritan to be found there with that wounded Jew would have been prima facie evidence that he was the robber, and he would probably have paid for his presence there with his life. He did not know that the man had been robbed. For all he knew, he might have been drunk when he fell in the ditch. But he was wounded, and that was sufficient appeal for his aid. He was willing to leave his own safety to God while he went to rescue the perishing.

Alighting from his beast, he began immediately to do all he could to save the life of the man who was nearly gone. He tried his best to stop the flow of blood and to keep the poor man's life from seeping away. Perhaps he used strips of his own clothing to bind up the wounds of the man, "pouring on them oil and wine." The wine was for an antiseptic and the oil was for soothing. When the wounds were dressed and the man was made as comfortable as possible, the Samaritan didn't swell out his chest and say, "I did thus and so for him. Now if everybody else will do as much for this fellow as I have done, he will be alright." Instead, he lifted the wounded man into his own saddle, while he trudged along over the rocky road until he reached an inn.

When they reached the inn, he did not give the inn-keeper a little money and ask him to give the man some medicine during the night, but he looked after and ministered to him personally. He wanted to make sure that the man did not get a backset for lack of proper care, so he sacrificed a night of sleep and rest for the sake of the patient. He remained with him as long as he was needed, and then he made provision for his future care. He instructed the inn-keeper to take care of him until he was well, and promised on his return to pay the bill, whatever it might be. I can hear him say to the unfortunate man whom he befriended, "I wish I might stay with you until you are well, but I have some other very important matters that I must attend to. I have left some money with the inn-keeper to pay for your care until you regain your strength, and in case it is not enough, I have arranged with him to charge it to me, so I don't want you to worry about it in the least."

Love serves the needy. When love finds a need, it seeks to supply it. The Samaritan washed the wounds and bound them up. Love acts that way. It ministers to the needy, feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, gives drink to the thirsty, visits the sick, entertains the lonely, leads the blind and comforts the sorrowing. Love finds a way to soothe the aches and pains of the wounded, the burdened, the sorrowing and the discouraged. Love forgets

self and sacrifices for others. Love is the costliest thing in the world, and the person who loves always pays. Loving service is never a burden. A little girl was carrying her brother on her back, and 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 only God 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 many today.

Christ asked the lawyer which one acted like a neighbor to the wounded man. He answered correctly by saying, "The one who took pity on him." The Lord Jesus then said to him, "Go on and keep on doing likewise." Thus Christ tells us that the cultivation of this neighborly spirit is the duty of all.

Allow me in closing to point out some philosophies of life as exemplified in this story.

1. "What is yours is mine if I can take it."
This old philosophy of the bandits or robbers is still very prevalent in our world, and whether it is practiced by an individual, a family, a corporation or a nation, it is cruel, ruthless and brutal.
2. "What is mine is yours if you pay me for it."
The inn-keeper must have found a satisfaction in being engaged in a business that was at once legitimate and of benefit to humanity. To be an honorable man in an honorable business is good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough.
3. "What is mine is mine, and I intend to keep it for myself."
The priest and the Levite were not mean men. They did not kick the man on the ground or even search him to see if he had any money left. Their sin consisted in passing by a needy person. No amount of hymn singing, church attending, Bible reading or praying can take the place of loving and serving needy humanity.
4. "What is mine is yours if you need it."
This was the philosophy of the Good Samaritan. Alfred Noyes has reminded us of how cold we can be to human suffering so long as it does not touch the lives of our immediate relatives or friends. How much we all need to hear and to heed the message of the Good Samaritan! Anyone and everyone who is in need is my neighbor. To obey Christ is to see in every needy man a neighbor.