



HG13: The Parables Of Jesus

'The Parable Of The Good Samaritan'

Luke 10:25-37

Home Group Sermon Notes

10th May 2009 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction: Can you remember the definition of a parable? I remember from Sunday school that a parable is an: *An earthly story with a heavenly meaning.* Did you know that a third of all Jesus' teaching was done in parables? Parables are stories intended to convey spiritual truths. They're not historical or accounts of actual events. The situations they describe never really happened, and the people involved aren't real people. Having said that, these people *could* be real, and that's the point. The characters are instantly recognizable, regardless of time or culture that's why these deceptively simple little stories are so full of wisdom and so true to life.

The Occasion of the Parable: The telling of this parable was the result of a conversation between Jesus and a scribe - an expert in the law. Unlike most people of Jesus' day, these men were educated - they could read and write. A scribe was someone who made copies of the Scriptures by hand. And through this constant exposure, they became very familiar with the Pentateuch and Psalms etc. However, they weren't just copyists; they were scholars, teachers and lawyers. Because of their expertise, they were looked upon as authorities in the interpretation and application of the Torah/Law. They were respected as men of wisdom, and had great influence in the regulation of Jewish civil and religious life. And so it was nothing out of the ordinary that one of these experts should test Jesus about his orthodoxy. *Teacher, he asked, what shall I do to inherit eternal life,* vs25. It's not the first time that a lawyer has phrased a trick question - I saw that many times when I sat in Crown Courts. Perhaps this lawyer was hostile to the teaching of Jesus; or perhaps he just wanted to see how Jesus would respond. However, the wording of the lawyer's question is quite revealing. He didn't see the contradiction of his own words: *What shall I do to inherit eternal life?* Nobody inherits anything by doing things. An inheritance is something we receive because we have a relationship with someone; it's not something we achieve by something we've done. And so, by using those words, he showed how muddled his thinking was. Like so many well meaning and decent people in our world today, this man thought he could attain eternal life by good works rather than a gift, freely given by God's grace. But fundamentally, he wanted to prove something, vs29: *he wanted to justify himself.* In other words, he wanted to establish that he was righteous and godly; that his knowledge and wisdom and observance of the law, were sufficient to make him acceptable to God.

Wrong Motivation: Jesus showed great discernment here. He sensed that, although the question was put to him respectfully and thoughtfully, the inner motive was not spiritual illumination and so Jesus asked him a question: *What is written in the Law? How do you read it?* (vs26). The lawyer had no hesitation in quoting from Deuteronomy and Leviticus, part of the Shema, a confession regularly made in Jewish worship: *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 Love your neighbour as yourself* (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18). Jesus approves the lawyer's reply: *Excellent! You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live* (vs28). This shows that Jesus didn't deny the moral demands of the OT. Whilst the ceremonial/sacrificial system was soon to pass away, having its complete fulfilment in Jesus, the moral law stands as God's standard for all time. But is it possible to be judged righteous, by God, through keeping the law? Can our efforts to do the right thing ever make us holy in God's sight? No. As the apostle Paul teaches: *[We] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.* (Galatians 2:16) The lawyer was attempting to be justified by his works. He was seeking righteousness in knowing and keeping every rule and regulation. But what he didn't understand was that we all fall short of that love, vs27, we fail to love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind. We fail to love our neighbour as fully and completely as we do ourselves (read Luke 6:27-36). And we fail to love God the way we should. But this is where people begin to change/redefine God's Word and commands for living to make them attainable and attractive. We see that in the CofE through the onset of Liberalism, and we certainly see that in society at large, don't we?

God says that we should love him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. But when we fail to do that, we redefine the command to mean that we should love God to the best of our ability. Love him most of the time. Love him with exceptions for extenuating circumstances. That way, we don't have to repent, or confess our sin or ask forgiveness. We don't have to depend on Jesus, but trust in our own self-righteousness. Jesus, didn't enter into a theoretical debate with the lawyer. He complimented him on his answer, which was theologically sound - the law of love towards God and neighbour. *Do this, said Jesus, and you will live,* vs28. When the lawyer heard this, I guess he was a bit sheepish. He'd asked, what seemed to be, a profound question but now it was apparent to the crowd who were listening that he already knew the answer. And so he did some quick thinking to restore his dignity, and came up with another question, vs29: *Who is my neighbour?* The lawyer wanted to make the issue complex and philosophical but Jesus made it simple and practical. The lawyer wanted to define and limit his obligations. But it seems to me that he was only digging a hole for himself. He wanted to restrict the number of people he was required to love. He wanted to make up a list of his neighbours, so that he could love only those people and ignore everyone else. And that's just what people do today. It's what you and I do. We want to know who we're required to serve, and who we can bypass. We want to know the minimum requirement; what's the least we can do and still consider ourselves to be good Christians. Some of us may set that standard high, and others may set it low. But it doesn't really matter. Because when we operate within that mindset, we're missing the point. That's not love; it's legalism. It's empty law keeping. It's a kind of 'service' which serves our own ego/preconceptions and not God.

The Meaning of the Parable: If you asked someone today what is the meaning of this parable they would probably say that it teaches that we ought to be kind towards those who are our neighbours. Benjamin has a Children's Bible, which concludes the parable with these words: The stranger was kind - and Jesus said we are to be kind, just as this stranger was. But this is wrong! I've told Benjamin this is theologically unsound; that I don't want a heretic of any age in our home; and that his exegesis (interpretation) leaves a lot to be desired! Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to illustrate the difference between a religion of works and a faith of the heart. Vs30: *A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.* Notice that we are told nothing about this man; not his nationality, or his occupation, or whether he was rich or poor. Which points to an important principle: Love doesn't depend on any characteristic of the one being served except their need. If the man had been wealthy, he might have been able to reward the person who helped him. If he had been a person of high status, the motivation may be respect to his position. If the injured man had been a Samaritan himself, you could explain the rescuers response as an example of ethnic solidarity (helping out one of your own). Continuing on, we see that both a Priest and a Levite pass by the injured man. The Priest offered sacrifices and the Levite assisted in the maintenance of the Temple.

Unfortunately (like many churchgoers today) their faith was not the life changing, radical faith that God requires. It was a formal religion that didn't affect the way they lived. Both were regarded as very religious and in a higher class. Yet they both deliberately avoid the beaten up man. Jesus tells us that they saw him, so there's no possibility that they failed to notice him lying there in the ditch. They saw him, they saw that he was hurt, and they chose not to offer assistance. Not only that, but both of them passed by, 31&32: *on the other side*, that is, they got as far away from him as they could! How can we explain such a lack of sympathy, heartlessness, and indifference? Let's consider some of the excuses they might have used:

- 1) The priest and Levite might have persuaded themselves that he deserved what he got. Perhaps they even convinced themselves that his misfortune was due to God's judgement and who were they to interfere with God?
- 2) Perhaps they used the "I don't do anybody any harm" technique. It's done by turning God's positive command of *love your neighbour* into something less demanding, like "I don't do anybody any harm". But not mistreating our neighbour doesn't mean that we have shown love to him.
- 3) They might have been afraid that the men who robbed this man were still hiding in the vicinity, ready to attack the next person who happened along. Have you ever refused to help for fear that whatever 'got' them might 'get' you as well?
- 4) Maybe it was because they were travelling in the opposite direction. Perhaps they didn't have the time, or the inclination, to change their plans to help someone along the way.
- 5) Or perhaps they convinced themselves that he was dead already. No use wasting time stopping to help if there was nothing they could do.
- 6) Maybe they had urgent business to attend to. They were important men and stopping to help this man would delay them and upset their busy schedules.
- 7) Perhaps they expected someone else would come along - someone less important. Someone who wasn't in a hurry. Someone with more resources.
- 8) Perhaps they believed in the 'Charity begins at home' technique, which limits are set in applying God's command to love others as themselves?
- 9) Perhaps the man's physical condition was the reason. Naked, wounded, possibly with broken bones or internal injuries. Caring for him would be very unpleasant. Messy. Smelly. Expensive. Better to leave him to someone with the proper training.

I'm sure there are at least another half a dozen reasons for passing by. But they all sound disturbingly familiar, don't they? But the problem isn't that the Priest and Levite couldn't somehow justify their actions (or inaction). I'm sure they could. The problem is that that was their goal in the first place - which was to justify themselves, rather than to act in love. Their goal was to 'do the right thing' or at least persuade themselves that they were doing the right thing. Their goal was to conform their outward behaviour to some code of conduct. And the welfare of the man on the road wasn't their main concern.

The Good Samaritan: If Jesus had told the story of a Jew helping out a Samaritan, it would have made a powerful point, but to turn it on its head as he did, and portray two pillars of the Jewish establishment as "non-neighbours" and a Samaritan as a true "neighbour" was radical teaching. It left the Jewish legal expert almost speechless. This was a classic case in which Jesus reverses the expectations of his hearers. Priests and Levites were respected and honoured, while Samaritans were despised and held in utter contempt. There is still this hostility between neighbours in modern times: between Palestinians and Jews; between Serbs and Croats; between Sunni and Shiite; between members of the IRA and UVF; between Black and White; between Christians and Muslims; between Upper Class and Working Class; Travellers and the settled community, and much more besides. Someone once wrote: *To love the whole world for me is no chore; my only real problem's the neighbour next door.*

The interesting thing in this passage is that Jesus didn't actually say that this story was a parable, and so it could well be the story of an actual event that took place. For Jesus to tell a story that made the Jews look bad and the Samaritans look good would either be dangerous or self-defeating. They could say: "You just made that up and we know nothing like that would ever happen." And so it is possible that some of his listeners, as well as the lawyer, knew that such a thing had really happened. Yet, ignoring history, racial and social differences, the Samaritan, vs33: *took pity* on this man. The words *took pity* in the Greek refers to a deep feeling coming from one's bowels or intestines. There was such a compelling power in the Samaritan's heart that he couldn't just stand still. He had to do something. A heart of compassion is always followed by action. It might result in moving into situations which, humanly speaking, might be avoided.

But the love of Christ breaks down barriers. The Good Samaritan broke through the racial barrier, putting the priest and the Levite to shame. The Samaritan didn't see a Jew but a fellow human being in need and the help he gave was costly. He would have ripped his own clothing to make the bandages, used his own wine to disinfect the wounds, his oil to soothe, his donkey to transport the man, and his money to pay for the inn. His love wasn't limited - it was practical with no thought for any return. It was the Samaritan, and not the Priest or Levite, who acted in accordance with the true meaning of the law. They used the letter of the law to justify their lack of love. He, on the other hand, lived out the spirit and intention of the law by loving sacrificially. He took pity on the man, where the others thought only of themselves.

Conclusion: Although Jesus didn't say anything disapproving to the lawyer, he questioned his thinking when he asked him: *Which of these three do you think proved a neighbour to the man who fell among robbers* (36). The only answer he could possibly give was: *The one who showed mercy on him* (37). He couldn't bring himself to say the word Samaritan. We too, can easily become selective as to who benefits from expressions of our Christian love. It's easy to raise barriers as to who is qualified for our caring. Jesus warned his disciples against restricting their hospitality to only those who could return it. It's much harder to show love to those who appear to us as 'unlovely'. It's only when we see these 'neighbours' as beloved of God that our self-made barriers will collapse.

The lawyer asked the wrong question. He asked, "who is my neighbour?" In other words, "who am I obligated to serve?" "What are the limitations on whom I have to love?" But the question Jesus answered was, "who can you be a neighbour to?" Who can you love? And the answer to that question is: anyone. Everyone. If you're concerned with justifying yourself, your primary questions will be questions of obligation. Who am I obligated to serve, and how? What are the limits on my obligation? How will I know when I've done enough? But if you're concerned with showing love, as Jesus was, then your focus won't be on yourself at all, but on those who need you, those God has given you the opportunity to bless and care for. That's the difference between false Christianity and true Christianity. And the obvious question, in closing, is this: which kind of Christianity is yours?

We live in a suffering world. There are people everywhere who are wounded and hurting. Some have been robbed by parental failure; others have been left half-dead as a result of their own decision-making and choices. Some are being destroyed by living in the world we do. Some have been damaged by false teaching or let down by so-called Christians. We come across them daily. We never know when our opportunity will come to be their "neighbour". What should we do? The words of Jesus to the lawyer, are the same words spoken to us: *Go and do likewise* (37). It's not always popular or convenient or cheap to follow the example of the Good Samaritan, but it is, without any shadow of a doubt, the right thing for each one of us to do.



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COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.

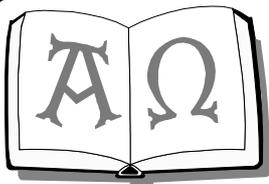
Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins)

The summer weather will soon be upon us! What is your most favourite activity/event during the summer months? Is it exclusive to the summer or can you enjoy it all year round?



Looking Upwards - *Worship* (10 mins)

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



Looking Upwards - *Bible Study* (40 mins)

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

1: Have you ever been guilty of engaging with God (just like the lawyer) on an intellectual level rather than from the heart? What, for you, changed your attitude/approach? How long did this process take for you?

2: Have you ever deliberately avoided helping someone either by walking away or by not responding (perhaps using one of the nine reasons suggested in the section: Meaning of the Parable)?

3: The Samaritans, to the Jews, were outcasts and were not to be befriended at all. Who is the Samaritan/outcast in your life? What steps can you take to restore and heal that relationship?

4: Helping others can be costly, not only in money, but in time and energy and reputation. However, when we give of ourselves to others in this way, God usually blesses us as a result of our loving actions. Can you think of a situation when you have 'gone out of your way' to help someone and God has used this to His glory? Can you think of a situation when you were touched by someone's exceptional kindness?

5: The Samaritan had compassion on the man and this showed itself in practical help. Name one thing that you could do this next week (perhaps something you've avoided doing in the past) as you seek to show the love of God to someone that society ignores and treats as an outcast?

6: Are we, as a church, guilty of not doing all we can to reach out to the neglected and rejected in society? Give one or two examples. What can you/we do to address these issues? What could be put in place?

7: What, in your view, is the most important point we can learn from this parable as we seek to live as followers of Jesus in today's world?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards - *Caring for each other* (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



Looking Outwards - *Concern for others* (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).

