



HG260: Sharing Our Faith Like Jesus
The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

Home Group Study Notes

18 June 2023 - Rachel Orford



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

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Spend some time sharing about your favourite holiday destinations. Where was your most exotic? Most memorable? Most recent?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Home Group Sermon Notes

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SHARING OUR FAITH

I imagine we would all like to be able to share our faith with others more successfully than we do wouldn't we? I certainly would – which is why the title of this sermon series “Sharing our faith the Jesus Way” appealed to me so much. Who better to get some pointers from? As the introductory notes say “when Jesus spoke, people listened and their lives were never the same again.” Clearly, we aren't Jesus, but wouldn't it be great if we could do a little bit of life changing? After all Jesus expects this of us. In Mark 16 He tells his disciples at the end of his time on earth “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” We are his disciples too and although all creation might be a tall order, we could at least start with our friends and neighbours.

I think one of the barriers to sharing God's word with others is that a lot of people see the gospel as irrelevant – it all happened over 2,000 years ago and things have moved on since then. What could stories about shepherds, Samaritans and mustard seeds have to tell us that would make a difference to our lives today? Plus, it was all set in the middle east and honestly things are done differently there – even today. And I understand this. Finding ourselves transported back to a foreign country several thousand years ago would make daily life seem pretty impenetrable.

THE CULTURE OF GOD

Recently, I came across a book by a scholar called Nadim Nassar who was the first Syrian to become a priest in the church of England, called ‘The Culture of God’. In it, he reminds us that to open the scriptures for both ourselves and others we need to be mindful that there are not only our own culture and the culture of the texts of scripture but also the culture of God. The interaction between the father, son and holy spirit in their relationship of great love produces their own way of being which transcends earthly cultures. It is the culture lived out in the Kingdom of Heaven - obscure to human beings but revealed to us through the life and teachings of Jesus – including the parables such as the one we have read today, which we call the parable of the Good Samaritan. Now I think people might want to hear about that!

Jesus' parables contained many levels of teaching and engaged his listeners so that with a little effort they could understand their real significance. For some who were not so inclined they would remain just stories. In Mark 4 Jesus is quite open about this, telling his disciples “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding....” Jesus's parables are open to everyone who has a heart to learn; all classes, all races, all ages and levels of education are invited to dig deeper according to their level of understanding. So what might the many layers of the parable of the Good Samaritan be revealing about the culture of God?

KINDNESS

In recent years there has been a bit of a revival in the recognition of kindness as one of our essential core values hasn't there? The author Roald Dahl famously said “I think probably kindness is my number one attribute in a human being. I'll put it before any of the things like courage or bravery or generosity or anything else..... it covers everything, to my mind. If you're kind that's it.”

A popular t-shirt slogan last year was “If you can be anything, be kind” and there is even a movement called the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation.

If we look at the Good Samaritan parable as a story in its own right, then kindness is pretty much it’s central message. As Tom Wright says in his commentary on Luke’s gospel, the general moral sense of the parable is “if you see someone in the ditch, go and help them”. In fact, it illustrates this so well that it is used to help teach children the importance of kindness and compassion and is often one of the first bible stories that they learn.

And it’s a pretty good message. Throughout his ministry Jesus modelled kindness and taught extensively about how we should treat others regardless of who they are. In Matthew 5 he even urged people to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” He taught us not to judge other people, and “in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets”.

In Matthew 25 he relates kindness specifically to the Kingdom teaching that when anyone feeds the hungry or thirsty, provides for strangers, the needy, the sick or imprisoned, they effectively do it for Him; God himself feels their compassion. So, if we take nothing else away from this parable, learning that the culture of God embraces kindness and compassion is not a bad start.

INCLUSIVITY

But the telling of this story has a context which allows us to see further into what Jesus is revealing about himself and the kingdom. And a little understanding about the culture of the time helps. We don’t know anything about the occasion or who else was there, but we do know that the pharisees and teachers of the law were suspicious and wary of Jesus. We are told that this lawyer’s intention was to test Jesus, so the likelihood was that he wouldn’t have done this without an audience.

His first question is not unreasonable – “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” But being who he was, he would have known perfectly well the correct theological answer to this question. He was an expert in the law and he undoubtedly knew every single point of the Torah; including the system of rules that he had inherited and which people like him had used to turn obedience to God into an obstacle course of picky dos and don’ts. Jesus pointed him towards Old Testament scripture – an authority which they both would have accepted as the truth. The lawyer quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 which commands loving the lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and also loving your neighbour as yourself. Jesus agrees that his is correct and says that in doing this he is sure to inherit eternal life.

But the lawyer realises that he cannot possibly keep this law. There will always be people in his life that he cannot love so he tries to find a loophole; he wanted to justify himself. Asking “Who is my neighbour?” suggests that he thinks there is such a thing as a non-neighbour – to whom he doesn’t need to show compassion. For the Jews relationships were pretty much a system of concentric circles with them at the centre, the next circle being their immediate family, then next more distant relatives, and finally other Jews. Outside the circle were other people – gentiles and foreigners including Samaritans. Jesus challenges him to reconsider this limited view and in effect shows him what a neighbour means in the culture of God.

He tells the now familiar story of a man of undisclosed background or nationality, who is attacked by robbers and left for dead on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. He is then passed by three travellers on the road and we hear about their responses to his predicament. The distance between Jerusalem and Jericho was about 17 miles and many temple workers lived in Jericho so it would not be unusual for them to travel this dangerous road. Part of the road was apparently so renowned for attacks by robbers and bandits that it was nick-named “the way of blood” by locals and Jesus’ audience would probably have known exactly where he was talking about. Being godly men, if anyone could be expected to show compassion to the injured man it was surely a priest or a Levite – but both of them crossed over the other side of the road to avoid him.

A popular excuse for their behaviour is the purity rules to which they must adhere if they were to be able to work in the temple. The man could quite easily have been dead and Leviticus 21 expressly forbids priests from going near to a dead body. If so, it would not be the only time Jesus would have highlighted a mismatch between a strict adherence to the law and living with the purity of a good heart. Just one chapter later, some of the Pharisees commented on Jesus not carrying out the required cleaning and washing rituals before eating and he replies, “you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ...”. Their hypocrisy is one of Jesus most frequent objections to way they behave.

I’m not so sure that the purity laws had anything to do with their reluctance to help. The account clearly says that the travellers were going down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, so they were going home and not to the temple and the rules would therefore not apply. It is more likely that disinterest or perhaps fear overrode compassion.

Not so the Samaritan. And to understand how shocking this would have been to the lawyer, we have to appreciate the cultural enmity between Jews and Samaritans. Jews viewed the Samaritans as unclean. Amongst their many objections to them were blasphemous religious practices and ways of worship, racial intermarriage and the fact that Samaritans only recognised the first five books or the Old Testament as true scripture. There was much suspicion and bitterness on both sides and traditionally neither would have dealt with the other. To the Jew there was no such thing as a ‘good’ Samaritan, but this parable has effectively changed the meaning of Samaritan in modern day English. ‘Good Samaritan’ is used today to identify a helpful and charitable person and we have even named an organisation which helps people in despair and hopelessness The Samaritans. But when Jesus asks the lawyer who in the story was a neighbour to the man in distress, he cannot even bear to say the word Samaritan, but simply says “the one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus has turned the lawyer’s question on its head. Being a neighbour is not just about deciding which people should I help? But also asking “when I need help, who would I want to help me?” The man in the story would likely be dead if he had not surrendered to the help of the Samaritan. Jesus is showing that there is a way of mutual compassion and collaboration and challenging his listeners to see that their way of confrontation and conflict between Jews and Samaritans or Romans or gentiles or whoever was not God’s way of living. His culture exemplifies inclusivity, friendship, cooperation, acceptance and peace and this is the way to eternal life.

EXTRAVAGANT LOVE

What a message for today’s world! How different things would be if we could embrace those values. But left to our own devices we often do the wrong thing and we are probably less surprised that the first travellers failed to help than we are that anyone stopped at all – let alone a Samaritan. But he did so with such extravagant love and generosity, going well beyond what would be expected of him to save someone who would probably never be able to adequately repay him. But of course this is just what Jesus did for us on the cross.

This reveals another layer to our parable, pointing us very clearly to the story of our salvation. We find many examples of the compassion and love of Jesus in the gospels and there are a number of parables in which a character who shows these qualities clearly represents God – at least to those who take the trouble to look for a symbolic meaning - and the other characters we meet often have their own places in our stories too. It’s easy for us to identify the man on the side of the road as ourselves, as humanity – desperately in need of rescue from the robbers which represent sin and forces of evil in the world which stall us on our journeys. We rely on many things to sustain us and help us out of our predicament – other people, material wealth, alcohol, drugs and other addictions, our status and even other gods; these can be represented by the priest and the Levite, who despite outward appearances, ultimately let us down. Our Good Samaritan is of course our extravagantly loving and forgiving God, in the person of Jesus. He rescues us, soothes our wounds and heals us with his blood and the power of the Holy Spirit before leaving us in the safety of his church (or the inn in this story) with sustenance to keep us safe until he returns and takes us to be with him in his kingdom.

I'm not sure that Jesus intended the parable to be interpreted by his audience as a salvation allegory, but the lawyer's questions and the subsequent answer did expose how inadequate our own efforts are to earn us eternal life. At the end of their encounter Jesus advises the lawyer to "go and do likewise." In other words he should go and do what the law tells him to do. But this was an impossible obligation for the lawyer and also for us. We cannot always keep to even the greatest of commandments to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" or "love your neighbour as yourself," because of our human condition. We need saving. Only the redeeming love of God can do this by sending Jesus Christ to fulfil the law in its deepest sense, taking the wounds of sin from us and healing mankind.

We don't know what happened next. We don't know if the lawyer was changed by this teaching and did go and do likewise. It is easy to look down on him because of his questioning which revealed that he was focussed on the wrong thing. Knowing the right answer is not enough if it doesn't lead to transformation – helping us to be more like Christ-like. But we can use this story as a mirror to examine ourselves. We walk past people in need every day. They may not all be beaten up and bleeding, but there are plenty of people who are hurting and in need of our help. Often we don't see them or we can think of excuses not to help; we don't know what to say, we aren't qualified, someone else will help.

But we shouldn't give up on ourselves – God certainly hasn't. Richard Carter, the Vicar for Mission at St Martin in the Field writes "The greatest poverty is to believe you cannot help another, and it is a real truth that those who believe they have least in fact often have the grace to give the most. We all have the opportunity to be the Good Samaritan." Our passage reveals much about the culture of God – that it promotes kindness and compassion, inclusivity, friendship, cooperation, acceptance, peace, generosity and extravagant love. And if we honestly try to embrace these values in our own lives, what better way could there be of sharing our faith?

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*The LORD bless you and keep you: the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you: the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26*

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Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: One challenge about sharing our faith is that others might find the gospel irrelevant in today's world. How might you convince them otherwise?

2: What 'random acts of kindness' have you witnessed? What might they reveal about how God is working in the world today?

3: Read Matthew 25:42–46. What, if anything, do you find challenging in these verses?

4: From whom might you find it hard to accept help and why?

5: In what way has God revealed his extravagant love to you?

6: What do you understand by the idea of a 'culture of God' which transcends all earthly cultures? In what ways did Jesus reveal what it was like during his time on earth and in his teaching?



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



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group 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!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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