

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

[25] On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

[26] "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

[27] He answered: " '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 neighbor as yourself.'"

[28] "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

[29] But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

[30] In reply Jesus said: "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. [31] A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. [32] So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33] But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. [34] He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. [35] The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

[36] "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

[37] The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Exposition

Of all Jesus' parables, none has worked its way deeper into the American consciousness as the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The phrase "Good Samaritan" is used to describe any person who goes out of his way to help another. It's a theme that newspaper reporters love to feature because it captures readers' attention and fires the imagination. The largest recreational vehicle club in the United States is termed the "Good Sam Club" from its ideal of members helping one another.

But the Parable of the Good Samaritan says more than "It's good to help people in need." The parable is also about excuses. About self-justification. About letting oneself off the hook.

Who Was Neighbor to the Man? (10:36-37a)

" 'Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?'

The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' " (10:36-37a)

Now Jesus punches home his point. He asks the lawyer which of the three proved to be a neighbor to the wounded man, and the lawyer is forced to reply, "The one who had mercy on him."

The Greek word used is *e/eos*. In classical Greek *e/eos* is the emotion roused by contact with an affliction which comes undeservedly on someone else. The New Testament meaning of *e/eos* draws on the Hebrew concept of *hesed*, faithfulness between individuals that results in human kindness, mercy, and pity.[17] One summary of godly piety is found in Micah 6:8:

"He has showed you, O man, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy (Hebrew *hesed*, Greek Septuagint *e/eos*), and to walk humbly with your God."

Mercy is required of us (Isaiah 58:6-7; Hosea 6:6). Jesus commands his disciples very specifically: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

The lawyer began by asking for a definition of "neighbor" in order to justify limiting his love to his fellow Jews only. Jesus doesn't define "neighbor" in so many words, but his story makes it clear that our neighbor is whoever has a need. It doesn't matter who they are. Jesus' command to love our neighbor as ourselves knows no self-satisfying limits.