

The Parables of Jesus: The Good Samaritan

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[0:00] My friends, welcome here today for this Sunday, July 25th. I hope you were blessed by the wisdom and heart of Dr. Jerry Shepard over the past two weeks while I was away.

Our nephew, I should say, Brendan, I was talking to him after last Sunday, and he said, man, I was struggling to stay awake. And I said, oh no. I said, did you not find it engaging and enriching? And he said, not at all. He's so soothing. Nothing. So, right? And he said, how did you have him as a prof? How did you pass anything? Well, you didn't have to write papers for him. He's tough, as much as a teddy bear as he seems. He's tough, but he is fair. But you were soothed, I hope, because he is indeed soothing. There was one class when he was away, and I had an online course with him.

And he asked me to kind of moderate in a week that he was away. And I said, well, everyone enjoyed it, I think. But I said, they missed your dulcet tones. And he said, dulcet tones?

[1:07] I've never even, and I said, you've got to know. You've got to know. Well, and obviously, he took a few playful shots at me. Perhaps you noticed those as well, which was to be expected.

He and I would greet each other in the hallways of Taylor Seminary with just, Dixon, Shepard. That was it. But we have history, right? We've known each other a long time. But he shared some of his vast, vast knowledge of the Old Testament with you.

Particularly the book of Psalms. As you learned a bit two weeks ago about how to read the Psalms. And then last week, how to pray the Psalms.

He looked at those together. And I listened to those sermons. And they were good. And they were dulcet tones, to be sure. Dr. Shepard will be back again later in August to complete this mini-series on the Psalms that he started.

Because we'll be away again attending another family wedding. And hopefully that's the last one for a while. But I'll be officiating that one. So it'll be, I don't get to just be a passenger this time.

[2:12] But it is so good to be back with you this morning. So good to see some of you that I haven't seen in a few weeks. Or longer. And we're continuing in our series on the parables of Jesus this morning.

And throughout this series, we've been revisiting some familiar stories. And some that may be less familiar. I've talked to a few people and some of them have been totally new to them. And that's a very good thing.

As we've talked about, Jesus told over 40 parables in the New Testament. So at the risk of doing a 40 sermon series, which I wouldn't do that to you.

I love you too much. But we have, I believe, looked at, had an opportunity to look at some familiar and some less familiar. And in different categories, right? So my prayer for us is that God will grant us the eyes to see and the ears to hear the truth that is still in these parables for us today.

This morning, we're continuing with the category of parables, which have been known by one commentator as parables of the Christian life. And as a refresher, you may remember that we considered the Christian life, that phrase, means living a life that is connected to God through prayer, through perseverance, through trusting him and being faithful in our circumstances, the Christian life.

[3:42] But more than that, as followers of Jesus, we're called to do two things. Here comes a test. See, he gave you homework. I don't always give you homework, but here's a test.

Two things we are called to do above all. We are called to love, say it with me, the Lord our God with all our heart, I don't hear anyone, soul, mind, and strength.

We are called to love the Lord our God, louder, with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. And we're also called to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Our neighbors as ourselves. I want to begin with a story this morning. Early one evening, a successful young man took his new Nissan Maxima to the mall to buy his girlfriend a Christmas present.

He'd heard on the radio that his usual route was closed off, so he decided to chance it and go through a crazy, dangerous area of town to get there. He figured it was a better choice than going all the way around the city, which would have added two hours to his journey.

[4:58] Well, the area that he had to cut through was in the north end of the city, known for its gang warfare and biker bars. And he had a choice. He'd chosen the completely wrong time to go through as well.

As young punks had started to gather for their nightly escapades, certain young ladies also went to claim their piece of sidewalk for the nightly business of commerce.

Commerce. The young man stopped at a red light and found himself in the middle of a gang war. A gang member from one group took a shot at his enemy across the street, and the young man in the Maxima was unfortunate collateral damage.

A bullet grazed his shoulder and he cried out in sharp pain, but managed to pull over and stop the car. He got out of the car intending to go get help, but in his weakened state, he attracted the wrong kind of attention.

A couple of kids looking for some quick drug money noticed him in distress and decided it would be easier to give him a couple of punches and steal his wallet rather than to break into a store.

[6:09] They also noticed his car keys and the car running close by and put the two and two together. Soon, he was without his car, without his cell phone, or his wallet.

By the time they were gone, he was in rough shape, lying beaten and dirty on the sidewalk. He lay there for what seemed like hours, but it was really only a few minutes. He was thrilled when he looked up and saw a pastor from his local church walking by.

Help, John! He cried out feebly. But the leader crossed over to the other side of the sidewalk and didn't even look his way. The minister didn't usually walk this way, but he was on his way to a board meeting for all the churches in his district.

Unfortunately, the meeting was in one of the rougher areas of town, and John really wasn't used to this environment. He wished he'd been able to find parking closer, but he'd been forced to walk several blocks to his destination.

He saw the man laying on the ground from several feet away and felt nervous. Who knows what that man had been drinking or smoking to put him into a state like that.

[7:25] Often, these people were dangerous and unpredictable. Just for security's sake, he crossed over to the other side of the street. He was already late for the meeting, and he didn't want any complications.

I'm sure the police will deal with him, he thought. I need to get going. A faint wave of guilt washed over him, and hoping the man would be okay, he quickly told himself he wasn't responsible for saving the world.

They have people for that, he thought. It's not my calling. About half an hour later, a lady who attended church regularly walked by in a rush.

She was carrying a Bible, and the injured young man thought for sure she would help him. He tried to call out to her, but she didn't stop. Instead, she put her nose in the air and quickly walked away in horror and disgust.

The woman had lived in that area for years, and had seen everything decline in the last decade. What had been a hardworking population had been overrun by prostitutes and pimps and drug addicts.

[8:34] Every day, she heard more horrors on the nightly news that made her sick. She'd been proud to live here once, but now she lived in fear.

When she heard the young man call out to her, she was sure he would be begging for money to buy more of something. She was tired of being harassed by these welfare-dependent bums.

She looked at him in disgust, angry at the way the country was going, and hurried home to her little apartment, safe with the bars on the windows and a good security system.

She knew she shouldn't have gone out so late in the afternoon to begin with. Just as he was almost passing into unconsciousness, the young man caught a glimpse of a man in a jean vest, covered with patches and wearing tight pants.

Under different circumstances, he would have been afraid of this intimidating man, but he had no fear left. Just disconnected curiosity.

[9:43] I wonder what kind of bike he rides, he thought to himself. The man, who was dressed like a biker, parked his Harley and decided to walk to the bar where he was going to relax for a few hours.

He'd had a hard week at the mill and was looking forward to forgetting his troubles with some good friends. Later, he'd grab a cab and pick up his bike in the morning. No one on the street would dare touch it.

Just as he neared his destination, he noticed a young man who looked like he'd been beat up pretty badly. Feeling sorry for him, he went over and gently felt his wrist.

Yes, he was still breathing. He could feel a pulse. Are you okay? He whispered, not wanting to startle him. Not really, the young man replied.

Let me call you an ambulance. You look like you're in pretty bad shape. He used his cell phone to call 911. Waited with the young man until they arrived and paid the ambulance driver the \$500 fee.

[10:51] Take my cell, he told the young man. Use it to call anyone you need to know where you are. And here's a couple hundred to tide you over until you get all your ID straightened out.

Sorry for what happened to you, man. Those guys were jerks. The young man left in the ambulance and went to the hospital, used the cell phone to call his family and friends, and afterwards called the biker to give him back his cell phone.

How can I repay you? He said. Don't worry about it. Don't worry about it, the biker told him.

There are still a few good guys left in the world. I want to credit a lady named Shirley Swadey as the author of the story I just told you.

I adapted it a little bit, but she's the originator. And you probably now have a pretty good sense of our parable for today, don't you?

[11:56] The Good Samaritan. I have always felt like a contemporary telling of that story is a good entry point for us as a contemporary audience.

Now, let's look at the story as it's told in Scripture. It's found in the book of Luke, chapter 10, verses 25 to 37.

And this is a familiar, familiar parable, I think. Luke 10, verses 25 to 37. So go ahead and turn in your Bible if you have it, open your app on your phone, or you can listen as I read.

Beginning, Luke 10, beginning at 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?

What is written in the law? He, Jesus, replied. How do you read it? 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.

[13:10] You have answered correctly, Jesus replied. Do this, and you will live. But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, and who is my neighbor?

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.

A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was, and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 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. 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.

[14:30] Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? The expert in the law replied, The one who had mercy on him.

Jesus told him, Go and do likewise. The word of the Lord. Amen.

Knowing this parable fits into the category of teaching about the Christian life, which we touched on a minute ago, let's unpack this together to get a better sense of what Jesus was getting at here.

And I want to remind us of something right off the bat. We may think the answer to the question, What must I do to inherit eternal life? is pretty easy, right?

We likely have a complete understanding that the only way to be reconciled to God, the only way to overcome our sin nature, is to receive and declare Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

[15:32] To yield our lives to him, to follow his example. We understand that, right? But remember, at the time these events happened, Jesus hadn't been condemned or crucified yet.

Jesus had not died and been resurrected. This interaction is before all of that. So here we have an expert in the law, as the text tells us, who's coming from a deep knowledge of what we refer to, or seminary people, I guess, refer to as the Pentateuch, right?

You've heard that word before, I'm sure. Jewish people refer to it as the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. This is what an expert in the law would have been coming from.

The books from Genesis to Deuteronomy, that's what he knew backwards and forwards. And so that would have been the perspective that he was coming from in asking Jesus this question, what must I do?

He's looking at a checklist in the first five books of the Bible, saying, what do I got to do, Lord? And so then Jesus, as he so often does, as he so beautifully does, responds to a question with a question.

[16:53] I love that. He asked this expert, you're so smart, what do you think? And so there's so much that we could explore in this story, but I want to make it personal and applicable for us.

The parable of the Good Samaritan talks about neighbors. It talks about loving neighbors, really loving neighbors, in a way that we may not always consider.

So I'm going to pose three questions for us this morning about neighbors. How do we know who they are? Why should we love them?

And what does love look like? How do we know who our neighbors are? Why should we love them? And what does love look like?

Well, first question, how do you know who your neighbor is? Are you a literal person? First, for you, is your neighbor considered to be the person who lives next door?

[18:01] Or I'm going to go out on a limb, the person across the street or down the block. That's my neighbor. Or do you consider your neighbor to be someone you go to church with?

That's my neighbor. Someone you work with, someone you go to school with. Do you consider your neighbor to be someone with whom you already have a connection?

Someone you feel comfortable with? My English brain just said, with whom you feel comfortable. Feel better? So I think we can all agree that we generally tend to spend most of our time with whom?

People we like. Do you hang out with people you don't like? Do you hang out with people you don't feel comfortable with? Except maybe at family gatherings?

Is our neighbor someone we want to be able to choose ourself? Choose specifically within the boundaries of our comfort zone?

[19:03] Do you think that's the kind of neighbor that Jesus has in mind? Friends, we need to allow Jesus to choose, hear this, choose our neighbors for us.

Choose the people who most need our help, most need our friendship, need our support and encouragement. Can you recognize that? In the interest of time, I wasn't going to tell a story, a personal story of mine, but I might.

So I'll just keep it in the back of my mind if we, if I don't feel like I've lost you all by the end. One of Mother Teresa's favorite verses in the Bible is Matthew 25 verse 40.

And for me, it best defines how we should identify our neighbors. The verse says, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

It's heavy, isn't it? Whatever you did for the least of one of these brothers of mine, you did for me. The least of these.

[20:24] There's nothing in that phrase that suggests we should be filtering in any way the people Jesus brings into our lives. The people he is calling us to care for and love.

To put it simply, our neighbors are whoever Jesus tells us they are. That's it. Second question. Why should we love our neighbor? In the story I told at the beginning, the contemporary story, someone else will do it, right? Do you recognize that in yourself?

Seeing a situation where God might be calling you to step in and you step back. More than that, isn't it asking a lot for us to love our neighbors, especially someone who makes us uncomfortable or feel awkward or someone we wouldn't normally associate with?

The same way we love ourselves? That's a lot to ask, isn't it? I don't know about you, but sometimes I love myself a lot.

[21:40] I like to look after myself. I like to make sure I'm not uncomfortable. I feel like everything's going okay. But do you see what's happening there when that becomes our perspective?

That's the world's voice, my friends. The world's voice creeping in there again. Every person for themselves. Look out for number one.

Take care of yourself first. Because no one else is gonna. Do you see how counter that perspective is to what Jesus has called us to be and do?

Why should you be quick to care for anyone Jesus calls you to love? Friends, it's because God loved you first. It's that simple.

He beat us to it. He didn't set a limit for how far that love would go, how deep it would go, what it would cost. He gave everything for us.

[22:45] Everything. Think about this for a moment. Who first shared the good news of Jesus with you? His love for you?

And His saving sacrifice for you? Who, I'm sure we all know. What if they had decided not to bother?

Not to go out of their way? Not to reach out to you with the saving love of Jesus? What if they had considered you not to be their neighbor?

Or have you ever been on the receiving end of a random act of kindness from a stranger who helped when you were struggling to carry something heavy?

Came to check on you when you fell? Have you ever fallen in a, you know, in an awkward sort of way and slipped on ice or something and had someone actually come out of their way to check on you? It's a pretty good feeling.

[23:48] Or if you seem to be in distress in any way, have you ever had someone come up to you? Do you think that stranger spent a lot of time weighing your value to them?

Do you think they thought about the inconvenience helping you might create for them? Or how their comfort level in interacting with you might be affected before they recognized, just simply recognized, recognized your need and came to help?

I hope some of those considerations can expand our perspective on loving our neighbor. So I am going to tell you that story. As some of you know, I worked in landscaping for a few summers when I was in seminary.

And there was one day that I'll never forget. I went to a job site and I saw three young guys sitting in a truck outside in front of the, it was a big residential complex and we were doing really high-end stone tiling on the outside patios.

And I walked back and forth a few times and I saw these guys sitting in a truck. And I got this sense that I had to go over and talk to them. I didn't know what about.

[25:11] I said, Lord, I don't exactly know what this is all about. But I swallowed my introversion and I went over to that truck.

And I went over to the passenger side and all the windows were rolled up. The driver had his head in his hands down the whole time. And I went to the passenger side, just tapped on the window and

mouthing to his friend, is he okay?

And the guy shook his head and kind of raised his hands like I don't really know what to do and rolled down his window a little bit and I said, what's going on?

And he said, I'm going to try and keep it together. It may not work. He said, he just got off the phone with his mom in the Maritimes.

his dad just died. And I said, do you think he'd be okay if I prayed for him? The guy lit up and said, yeah, yeah, do that, do that.

[26:22] Went around to the other side and knocked on the window. And the driver looked over, kind of surprised, and rolled his window down. And I said, I'm so sorry. And I said, what's your dad's name?

I didn't say was. I said, what's your dad's name? He told me and I said, can I pray for you? And he said, yes. And I prayed with him. And I said, be well, God is with you.

I don't know your circumstances, but God is with you, my friend. And that was it. So, shortly after, they drove away. The next day, I was at the same job site and I came out of the building around the corner.

That truck pulled up and parked across the street. Just the driver in the car. He got out of the car with purpose, with no expression on his face, and came directly towards me.

And I thought, okay, Lord, I may need a shield and defender here. He came directly towards me and gave me one of the biggest hugs I've ever had in my life.

[27:37] And he said, dude, you didn't even know me. And he said, I used to go to church. I used to be close to God.

And he said, I just didn't know what to do in that moment. But he said, you showed up. And friends, I'm not taking any credit here because that's not, that's well out of my comfort zone.

But he said to me, you didn't know me and yet you came. And I said, I couldn't not answer. And he said, I'm too far gone from God.

I can't, I can't go back. And I gave him a little light punch on the shoulder and I said, buddy, it's never too late. I said, go back. He is waiting.

My neighbor, I didn't go to work that day expecting to meet a neighbor. God had other plans. In our parable this morning, we can recognize that the people we might assume would step up to look after that man chose to walk away.

[28:45] They chose to love themselves and look out for their own interests first and just ignore the person that God had placed right before their eyes.

So I wonder, how often do we choose to cross the street, choose to look away rather than stepping in when God is calling us?

And believe me, I have walked away. That story I told was not my way of saying, I'm the better man all the time. That was one time I let God have his way.

Third question, what does love look like? How do we know if and when we have loved someone that Jesus has put in our lives?

Well, we've talked in the past in past sermons about how limiting that English word love is, right?

And I'd even suggest the four Greek words that we've also explored, eros, storge, philia, and agape, which are even more specific in defining love, they don't necessarily do the concept justice either.

[30:04] Selfless, unconditional, eternal, without borders or boundaries or limitations. That's what the love of God represents for us, for all of God's children.

That's the kind of love that God has for us, that he asks us in turn to seek to model as we love others. Love can cost, love can sting, but ask Jesus what the cost was and how much it hurt.

So, what does love look like in a practical sense? Well, it shouldn't surprise us that just as the idea of defining the depth and breadth of that concept of love is challenging, how do we convey how we show love to our neighbor?

Well, it's just as unique, frankly. Showing love to your neighbor will depend on the situation, the circumstances, the need they may be experiencing, the kind of care they may require.

Sometimes showing love means just being there to listen. In the chaplaincy world, they call it a ministry of presence, just being there.

[31:29] Sometimes keeping your mouth shut is actually the best thing. being there to give someone a hug when they're struggling, just that comfort, that human touch that we're now more and more able to do again, which as a hugger, frankly, good times.

But at other times, showing love can be just as practical as the examples we were given in the story of the Good Samaritan. Helping someone who is in trouble, or someone who has a need that they can't imagine how they're going to fill.

We all likely have stories from our own lives of when God has either called us to care for someone else, or when we have received care. And I hope many of the stories that we share can involve people and do involve people who may have been total strangers to us before God called us to step up and step into their circumstances.

my friends, do you believe in God? Not a trick question. Can you speak to the ways in which God has changed your life?

Well, let me tell you something. The real evidence of that belief is not what we say we believe at all, but the way we act.

[32:59] loving our neighbors as ourselves means taking action in the interest of others. It means treating everyone we encounter as if they are Jesus, which may not always be an easy task.

What we do for others and how we treat them demonstrates what we really think about Jesus' words. To the expert in the law who quizzed him and to us as his followers, those words, go and do likewise.

Those words remind us of the command we have been given as well as the action and the potential sacrifice that that command may require. other. While it may not always be easy, I want to challenge each of us to ask God for opportunities to help others, to be his hands and feet to someone in need, to bring hope to someone who feels as though they have none.

my friends, let's be people who don't pass by on the other side, but people who, having received God's amazing love ourselves, go and do likewise to share that love with others.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.