

Go and do likewise

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0 : 00] We've got a couple more songs to sing. Depending on how the time goes, it's communion afterwards. I don't want to make it a marathon as I said last time.

Pretty awful thing if the preacher manages to make the difficult things Jesus said seem actually not too difficult at all. So I hope I'm not in risk of doing that.

You never know. What is difficult about it? Well, he's talking about a piece of behaviour which seems to be extremely costly in terms of the risk, in terms of the inconvenience, and, well, the financial cost.

And the other thing that seems to strike us about this conversation is the distasteful nature of the person that Jesus is saying we have to copy.

He's a Samaritan. So let's be clear about that. The Samaritans were looked down on by Orthodox Jews as being definitely second-class citizens, ethnically dubious, religiously dangerous, up the spout.

[1 : 48] and I remember reading a book where the writer aptly said to an Orthodox Jew the only good Samaritan was a dead Samaritan. So it's a little bit like Jesus preaching in a Roman Catholic cathedral and saying a Protestant did such and such or put it the other way round going to Ian Paisley's church and saying and here's somebody I'd like you to emulate Cardinal so-and-so was doing this and you could feel the intake of breath or going to a very Orthodox congregation and saying and Peter Tatchell gay activist did so-and-so you do the same as him and you if we've got the hang of it we ought to start to bristle and think can Jesus really be saying saying that sort of thing?

I think the only thing we can do is follow it through and just see what Scripture's saying and try to learn from it so let's follow it through.

On an occasion doesn't particularly link it with any other occasion on an occasion it so happened behold an expert in the law so he's a nomikos a law person a nevmaticos is a spirit person a spiritual person or psikikos is a the natural man this is a nomikos a law person just one word to encapsulate all that and he stood up to test Jesus teacher he said so he's respectful but I'm a little bit wondering about what the motivation is here because it says he stood up to test Jesus so I don't think he's asking Lord can you help me with this ethical dilemma I really don't know which way to turn on this what should I do

I don't think he's saying that he's sort of coming to Jesus with a notebook and tick boxes saying teacher what do you think about this one you know and he's ready to give Jesus marks out of ten something like that and the question comes teacher he asked what must I do to inherit eternal life which sounds like a good question it sounds like what must I do to be saved that's a good question I don't know I'm a little bit puzzled by this one what must I do to inherit eternal life because I thought that inheritance was something you couldn't do anything about one way or another if you've inherited your father's eyes or you've inherited your mother's sharp tongue or something like that inheritance is a gift isn't it so I'm a little bit puzzled by that question what must I do to inherit maybe it's just me and I would like to flag up

I think there seems to be an undercurrent of pride and of self in what this man's asking he's an expert in the law he comes to test Jesus he asks a question which to my mind seems to be slanted in the direction of self he's not saying how can I be grateful for what I inherit he's saying what have I got to do to inherit eternal life now I'm quite fascinated by this I'm not quite sure I understand all the dynamics of it Jesus I think this is one of the occasions where you can almost sense the calmness of Jesus and the way that he's got the measure of his inquirer so Jesus says well you've asked me a question so I'll ask you a question what does it say in the law you are an expert in the law what does it say and I love what he says how do you read it it's a beautiful way

of putting it isn't it there's the words we could all read the words how do you read it what sense do you make of it what do you come away with when you've read all that that you're the expert in and so the answer comes back it's a very full answer so what does the law say love the

[7 : 03] 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 I don't think I'm going to try and fault that answer it's very comprehensive isn't it and I noticed all the alls did you notice all the alls love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind that's that's a big love isn't it everything you've got all that I am and all that I have Lord Jesus I give it to you it's the same sort of thing as that isn't it to love the Lord your God with everything you are everything you have your mental capacities your physical capacities your aesthetic capacities your emotional capacities we all have different capacities in these areas but whatever capacity we have to love the Lord with all of all of that and to love your neighbour as yourself to love your neighbour as yourself neighbour I looked it up it's please see on coming from apparently according to my computer coming from the word to be near so your neighbour is the near one sometimes it's translated friend and I didn't finish doing the homework on that but it's an interesting thought that friend and near one can be certainly translated the same on some of these occasions so love your neighbour as yourself so however you love yourself however you would like yourself to be treated however you would like yourself to be thought of do that to this near person this person that's near to you whatever you think is fit for me is fit for them however you'd like me to be treated you treat them that way love your neighbour as now what's

Jesus going to say to that and he says you are correct and it's interesting that the expert in the law I think had come with his tick box to give Jesus marks out of ten and actually Jesus marks him out of ten and says you have answered correctly the word orthos meaning right not right morally or right relationship wise but correct you are correct that's right there's a correct understanding and then I think this is a sting in the tail he says that's correct now go and do it now go and do it there's quite a world of things in there isn't there now go and do it is it even possible for somebody to do that that's what we think about this morning that's one of the whole dilemmas of the old testament isn't it there's the law now can you do it is it that whole scheme of things such that if you really try hard you can do it and achieve it that's one of the hidden questions in the law all the way through isn't it and

Paul resolves it in the end and says you never could it was never meant to do that but Jesus poses the same question back to the chappy and says well do it then you've given me a correct answer in terms of information now let's see you live it in terms of behaviour and I think what an answer that is so what is he implying by that is he serious I think he's serious is it a complete answer I don't think it's a complete answer he says do this and you will live and he could have said he could have gone on to say once you try it you'll find you can't and you need to come back to me so that you can live because the law although it might seem to promise eternal life it can never supply it it's only me that can supply that so it's in a sense an incomplete answer but it throws it back at the expert doesn't it and is it an appropriate answer

I think Jesus being who he was I think it was appropriate I think he knew his man and the law expert comes to him full of law I'm going to test you on law know all about law and Jesus sort of pushes it back at him and says yeah you're correct now do it and the law man it says willing to justify himself and I'm pondering what that motivation is in in the way the rest of the new testament talks about justifying oneself it means to do something so that I am counted right counted righteous so he's saying I want to make myself righteous as an end result of this conversation don't want to go away feeling that I've got the worst of this or I've come off badly

[13 : 09] I want to justify myself and I don't know do you detect anything of pride and self I mean I think he's a nice chap but there is a I think there's an underlying bedrock of self and self righteousness justifying self and in order to do that he asks for clarification but who is my neighbour I have to say I have no idea whether he means this genuinely or not and I have no idea I can't figure out how this advances his cause but that's the question he asks and then Jesus goes to town on him doesn't he he says I mean I think he's asking so who should I count equivalent to me who is the person near to me that I should be treating as I would treat myself so is it other law people my neighbour is it people on the same social level as myself who does this apply to who are the people I'm supposed to love who should I treat as myself that seems to be the meaning of it so Jesus tells this story I presume it's a fictional story it looks in the grammar of it it looks like it looks no different

from a piece of history but I don't think it's meant to be a piece of history I think it's meant to be a story once upon a time there was a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho you do notice you go down from Jerusalem Jerusalem top place a little bit like going down from Oxford isn't it they go down from Jerusalem to Jericho is it okay so it's literally down I think it's down sort of spiritually or socially or something so this poor chap is going down from

Jerusalem to Jericho and he gets mugged I feel sorry for him he gets mugged they even take his clothes they beat him up and they leave him half dead so there's Jerusalem and Jericho is down here I've got some other lines on there and there's the chap left half dead and then Jesus goes on now you see there's a priest you might know him he might have been at a cocktail party with this priest a priest happened to be going down the same road and when he saw the man he deviated out of the way and passed by on the other side and also a

Levite so he's a religious professional as well he came to the place and he saw the man there he is beaten up half dead no clothes can't tell his social status you can't even tell his nationality poor chap there he is Levite when he came to the place and saw him he zoomed out of the way and passed by on the other side and now says Jesus now there was a Samaritan the lawyer the lawman Samaritan a Samaritan as he travelled came where the man was and when he saw him he was moved with compassion he took pity on him the compassion word in

Hebrew and Greek is to do with your tummy this part of you here and he felt compassion in his tummy in his innards he was moved inwardly he had compassion he took pity on the man and he goes to him and you realise that he is taking a risk because the robbers might not have disappeared they might be just waiting for some other mug to come and stop so he takes that risk and he goes over to him cleans him up bandage his wounds taking oil and wine which presumably were the appropriate medical treatments that were to hand and he puts the man on his own donkey but you're going to miss your appointment he goes on my own donkey and he takes him to an inn and he takes care of him and it takes all the day verse 35 the next day he takes out two silver coins so two denarii two days wages two days wages

[18:59] I don't know how much you get paid a day if it was a hundred pounds a day he gets out his credit card and says two hundred quid on that if there's more I'll come back and authorize it later and he gives it to the innkeeper and says look after him and when I return I will reimburse you for any expense you may have and there's the story and the question's going to be who considered this victim as himself who loved this poor man the way he loved himself so we had the priest who's a holy man by definition he's a man who's to do with the sacrifices of God he's a man whose job is to be serious about the things of God he's a religious man he's a pure man so is it him or is it the Levite who the same way is a holy man it's a man who's involved with the sacrifices made to God he knows the seriousness of these things he's filled with religious stuff and he's pure and uncontaminated is it him or alternatively is it the Samaritan who we know is unclean because he's a Samaritan he's actually in error because he's a Samaritan he's ignorant of the things that people are supposed to be aware of and serious about for all we know he's an idolater he doesn't really understand Israel's God and racially he's a mongrel he's a half breed we would look down on him people would look down on him wouldn't sit next to him in a cafe wouldn't drink from the same cup like

Jesus and the Samaritan woman and which of these three was neighbour to that victim which of these three understood the law of God which of these three understood what it was that God deeply requires of humankind the Samaritan who saw and was moved with pity and risked stopping and gave immediate aid despite the inconvenience despite the cost in time and with great generosity is it him who treated the victim as himself who was a neighbour to this man in accordance with the law of God who was neighbour to this man and

Jesus poses that question and the expert in the law cannot bring himself to say the word Samaritan he just blurts out well I suppose it was the one who had mercy on him yeah he was a Samaritan wasn't he and Jesus says well implicitly he says do you know that Samaritan understood more about the law of God than you do for all your degrees and your PhD in biblical studies and everything else that's the man that you are to to copy go and do like him now maybe I've succeeded in making it not shocking what's

Jesus doing I think he's deflating it's a bit of a worrying thing to say isn't it doesn't it make you feel a bit uneasy wouldn't Jesus have been better if he'd said and there was a priest and the priest went over and did all those things and it was the Samaritan who passed by on the other side he'd be so

much more comfortable with that but Jesus doesn't do that does he he seems to deflate this whole construct of the priest the Levite the expert in the law the religious people the nice people the good people the people who are our sort of people he says well that he deflates that and says you can be religious you can have all of that buttoned down sorted out and at the same time completely miss what God is really getting at isn't that shocking I remember hearing

[24 : 22] Steve what's his name the Baptist gentleman no Baptist Union got into trouble for writing a book in which the father was Steve Chalk yeah Steve Chalk Steve Chalk telling a story about the people coming to a prayer meeting at such and such church and there are street drinkers unconscious in the alleyway that the people are going down which the people going to the prayer meeting are going and they carefully step over the bodies of these unconscious street drinkers in order to get to the prayer meeting I mean it's a wonderful preacher's illustration isn't it makes you feel so uncomfortable and it's I mean did it ever happen I don't know but you get that you think oh dear

I really wouldn't like to have been in that situation so he deflates Jesus is deflating the self righteousness of why have I put N yes N the nomikos the law man I don't know does he puncture our self righteousness a bit do we think well what would I have done and we can say well of course one needs to be wise and I'm thinking this even now I'm thinking we drove on the way to Shoreham the other day and there was a there had obviously been an accident there were two cars pulled over in a lay by and as I drove past not on a huge miles an hour but I drove past I think I can't stop now it would be really inconvenient if I stop now it looks as though that accident happened a while ago it looks as though it's all under control I'll just drive on and as I drove on I nearly collided with another car in Shoreham Tunnel because that person had stopped to see what had happened in the accident

I don't think they were very wise you see I comfort myself with that thought it wasn't a wise place to stop I nearly bumped into them and caused another accident so I can comfort myself with that but I'm not quite sure whether I'm right to do so Jesus is pointedly showing that we can quite comfortably build up an idea of spirituality which is actually completely the opposite we could quite comfortably do that couldn't we we could say oh yes here's my religious week and this is what I'm going to do spiritually and we could find ourselves you know we're going down that same road and we can't stop and help this guy because we're on our way to you know such and such a prayer meeting or we're on our way to such and such whatever we could I don't know a bit frightening really to think we could be in exactly that same situation and Jesus is saying you know it is so easy for you to think for spiritual religious people like you and that's us isn't it to think oh you've got we've got it all sorted out we could even give

Jesus marks out of ten because we're so good at this and we've completely missed the point and I think thirdly Jesus is saying we may have to learn humanity from people we look down on and that ought to teach us humility I think he's saying that I don't think I've grasped everything that he's saying but I think he is saying this because what he's talking about is humanity isn't he it was that the Samaritan had human fellow feeling in his gut for this poor man and we are so used to overriding that I mean we've got I mean we can make lots of reasons for it look at all the he didn't see on the television all the stuff that we see of people starving here and children starving children there and wars here I mean what else can you do but turn over to the other channel do you see what I mean I mean who could blame us compassion fatigue how can we possibly care for all the people I'm saying these things to myself I'm not particularly confident that they're very particularly good reasons and he's saying we may have to learn humanity because the gospel doesn't make us less human does it it makes us more human

Jesus is the perfect human being the gospel doesn't make us less human well we can manage to do that to ourselves it makes us more human passing by this chap the priest is saying well is he Jewish distance you can't tell from his clothing better go by on the other side is he one of us I think humility is a valuable lesson from this I think it's meant to deflate us and to puncture us you know puncture like you do with a car tyre so we can get a bit puffed up as to how well we're doing and this sort of you're not quite doing as well as you think you're doing you still need a saviour you still need grace you still haven't got it right you still need forgiveness you still need the blood of Jesus

[30 : 10] Christ humility I think this guy needed humility I think if Jesus is puncturing his selfness I think he's moving him towards the gospel I think and here's my fourth comment I think he is teaching we cannot we cannot draw a line in the human race and say these are my neighbours

these are the people I'm close to these are the people that I it's legitimate for me to try and love these as myself but the ones the other side of the line I'm not really called on to love them as myself because they're not that close you know so I mean he does it in a controversial way so as evangelical Christians we could say well we'll treat people of the same ethnicity and general background of ourselves yeah we'll love them but Muslims we won't go out of our way to help them or we could say gays we won't go out of our way to help them you know you do the line yourself you draw the line and then

Jesus says I'm afraid you can't do that that's not on you can't you have no excuse whatsoever to say of those people well I'm not it doesn't include them I'm not going to love that person as myself not going to treat them as a human being may just be people that annoy you say well they don't deserve my patients they don't deserve to be treated civilly but what they did to my car you know whatever and Jesus says you have no right to draw that line who is my neighbour well he's whoever happens to be next door to you at that particular time that's the sort of thing he's saying and my concluding thought is this this man in the story saw a victim and instead of just saying oh well that's his problem went out of his way this man in the story went out of his way to go to this person at considerable risk and cost to himself to pick that person up as it were to bathe their wounds to carry that person on his own donkey

I'm carrying sort of as it were in his own hands to bring that person to a place of safety to look after them and to treat them with richness and generosity and kindness that really you could not have it goes far beyond what you know far and above the call of duty doesn't it that's the man in the story and I want to say don't you think that that's how Jesus treated us a ending ending