The Way of Mercy (PM)

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0:00] This is an extremely well-known parable. Probably this and the prodigal son may be the most well-known, the most famous.

This one in particular is so well-known, though, that its name, the Good Samaritan, has become proverbial. People say, be a good Samaritan. You read news articles about folks who are super kind to strangers, and invariably in the news reports they're described as good Samaritans.
You know, good Samaritan helps single mother or father pay for their groceries or something like that, right? Most states in America and provinces in Canada have good Samaritan laws.
Of course, in the final episode of the TV show Seinfeld, you might remember, all of the characters were jailed under the Good Samaritan law. Now, because of this, we assume the point of this passage is, would you please go out of church today and be a really good neighbor?
And, of course, that would be a tremendous thing to do. You should do that. But the problem is, I don't believe that this is what the passage is primarily about. I don't think it's primarily about that.
[1:22] In the Middle Ages, they looked at this passage and they allegorized it. So they treat it as an allegory for the gospel. So the robbed man represented Adam.

Jerusalem, where the robbed man came from, was paradise. Jericho, where he was going, was the world. The priest represented the law. Jesus was the Samaritan, of course. The wounds he suffered from were sin.
The inn, where the robbed man stayed, was the church. And the innkeeper was, can anybody guess? The pope, right? It was the pope.
And so that would have been a cracker of a sermon 500 years ago. But I think we can agree it's probably not what the passage is about. In modern times, we fall into another era of interpretation, I would humbly suggest.
And that is we turn it into just a moral lesson. Simply a moral lesson. Now, it is a moral lesson, but I don't think primarily.
[2:30] I think there's something else going on here, and I'll tell you why. The key to understanding is context. So think about this. Who is Jesus speaking to here? Who is he speaking to?

He is speaking to a self-justifying religious lawyer. And Jesus says to this man, go perform great things, great acts of mercy.
Why would Jesus point this man towards the thing that is killing him spiritually? His self-righteousness. See, the lawyer's plan, you remember, he's trying to get into heaven on his own performance.
So Jesus is just saying to him, yeah, here's like even more awesome things to do. That's the secret to eternal life?
Is that the whole message here? I don't think so. So that's the reason I think there's more going on than simply just a moral lesson. Let's get into it. We'll walk through the passage. So a lawyer puts Jesus to the test and asks him a question.
[3:34] What shall I do to inherit eternal life? Now this lawyer, the lawyer is not a lawyer in the sense of we think of them today. He would have been like a well-liked, well, I could probably just leave it there actually, couldn't I?

No, he would have been a well-respected expert in God's law. That was the job there. And Jesus says, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?
And Jesus says, what does the Bible say? And the guy gives an answer. Love God with everything you've got and your neighbor as yourself. So great answer, Jesus says. Now do it. Go do it and you'll live.

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Live this out perfectly and you'll be with God for eternity. Make sure you love God with everything you have. Make sure you do it all the time with no inconsistency. Make sure you treat people perfectly.
Do this and you'll live. Go do it. And here again, I'll repeat myself. I think we move away from the idea of this just being a moral lesson. Listen, Jesus is saying, go do it, lawyer.
[4:42] Not because he thinks the lawyer will rise to the occasion. He says it, hoping the man will recognize, I cannot do that. I'm doomed.

I'm lost. I'm helpless. I need a savior. In which case, Jesus would offer him forgiveness and a new life. But that's not how the lawyer responds.
The lawyer, he digs in his heels, still trying to justify his life. And he says, okay, well, who was my neighbor? He wants a list. He wants to be able to tick a few extra special, extra credit boxes.
He wants DIY salvation. But he doesn't get a list from Jesus. He just gets a story of radical and costly love. The parable of the Good Samaritan. I'll summarize it for you.
A guy goes on a trip and he's robbed and he's left for dead. And he's lying there on the side of the road. And he sees a man walking towards him. And he notices the guy's wearing like a clergy collar.
[5:39] You know, like the dog collar. And he thinks, ah, the clergy. Fantastic. Fantastic. Which is what you all think, I'm sure. But the clergyman walks by.

In fact, he crosses the street to avoid him. And then comes a Levite, does the same thing. Now, why do these folks, why don't they stop to help? We don't really know, but I think two reasons are likely.
The first one is, like us, they just don't want to get involved in other people's messy lives. Second reason, potentially, they looked at this guy and they thought, hey, he's probably dead.
But maybe he's not dead. But if he is dead and I touch him to see if he's still alive, I will become ceremonially unclean. And that is just a huge drama for me. Because I'm a religious expert and I'm just going to keep going.
Then comes the hero of the story, the Samaritan. Samaritans, as you know, were a hated race. The Jews believed that they were, they'd turned their back on their heritage.
[6:36] They were a hated people group. But shockingly, it's a Samaritan that does stop to help and he does some first century first aid. And then takes the robbed man to an inn. Pays for a month or two of care.

Just like remarkable love, really. Remarkable love. Opened himself up to the opportunity of being ripped off by the innkeeper. But does it anyway? Technically, they were enemies, remember.
But shows just tremendous compassion. Jesus finishes the story and says to the lawyer, There's my story now of the three men who was a good neighbor to the robbed man. And it's a no-brainer.
Of course, it's a no-brainer. But still, the lawyer can't bring himself to save the Samaritan. So he says, Then Jesus says, You go do likewise.
Just go do that now. Go love like that. Again, remember. This man was trapped in his own toxic, self-justifying ways.
[7:35] And Jesus gives him a new task. Raises the bar. Why? Jesus tells him this parable to give him an impossible task.

So that he would know he needs a savior. You see here, Jesus is trying to deflate the man. Jesus is trying to show him that the law is not some ladder you can ever climb to the top of.
It's just too high. C.S. Lewis is great on this. He says, Morality is a mountain we cannot climb on our own. And if we could, we would only perish in the ice and the unbreathable air of the summit.
Now this evangelistic approach of Jesus is not without precedent. Do you remember the story of the rich young ruler? A wealthy, sincere young man comes to Jesus with the same question as the lawyer.
Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life? He thinks like it's like I'm just nearly at the top of the mountain and I just need this one more thing.
[8:51] If you just tell me the one special thing I have to do and I'll be there. And Jesus says, sell your possessions and give them to the poor. And the young man goes away.

He's really sad because he's filthy rich. And Jesus interprets what happens for us. He says, How difficult is it for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God? It's very difficult.
It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom. Those who heard it said, Then who can be saved? But he said, What is impossible for man is

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possible with God.
Do you see what's happening here? Jesus gives him this yutrangula, Again, something that he can't do. Give everything away. The guy's not going to do that.
He can't do that yet. And Jesus explains, Yeah, it's going to be really hard for a guy like that to be saved. Really hard. In fact, it would be like trying to shred the largest animal in the Middle East through the tiniest hole imaginable.
[9:51] That's how hard it is. And of course, it's impossible. It's impossible. But then he follows it up by saying nothing is impossible for God.

Do you see what's happening here? Jesus gives the rich young ruler an impossible task so the man will recognize he is in a hopeless situation.
He needs a savior so he can be saved. That's how Jesus approached the rich young ruler. That's how Jesus approaches the religious lawyer.
I'm going to finish up shortly here. Some of you may know the name Bertrand Russell. He was one of 20th century's most forceful and interesting atheists.
He was very anti-Christian. He was so anti-Christian that he started a school for his own children so they wouldn't get indoctrinated accidentally by the Christian faith.
[10:53] What was not as well known though is he had a daughter called Catherine who became a Christian as an adult. I read this week that it was the doctrine of original sin that brought her to Christ.

Isn't that interesting? She said it was such a relief to be told that I must be perfect, perfect, perfect all the time. And just to quote her from her biography.
He says, For me the belief in forgiveness and grace was like sunshine after long days of rain. I'll read that again. For me the belief in forgiveness and grace was like sunshine after long days of rain.
No matter what I did, no matter how low I fell, God would be there to forgive me, to pick me up and set me on my feet again. Though I could not earn his love, neither could I lose it.
It was absolute, not conditional. Jesus once wanted this lawyer in Luke 10 to know that kind of forgiveness, to know that sort of grace.
[12:02] But first the lawyer had to see himself as a sinner who was lost. And that's why the parable was told. So he could see he could not love like the Samaritan.

He had no capacity to do that. And so that he would beg for forgiveness. Before we end, let's be clear though. At the start I said this is not just a morality tale.
But that does not mean we get to ignore Jesus' call to costly love. There's nothing wrong with Jesus' call to costly love. The problem is not the call. The problem is our hearts.
But the sequence is important, isn't it? The sequence matters. First, we come to Christ. Acknowledging that we need a saviour. That our hearts need to be remade.
And then we find forgiveness. And then Christ gives us new life. Calls us to love radically. He gives us new aspirations. And that's good news.
[13:08] That's the gospel. And I hope it's helpful for you to hear that again this morning. Now... . . . . .

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