

Who Is My Neighbour?

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Nov. 24, 2013

(Compassion Canada service. Notes adapted from material provided by C. C.)

Sermon in a sentence: My neighbor is anyone in need that I am in a position to help, and I must help, in Jesus' name.

Scriptures: Luke 10:25-37 NASB

This morning we are going to a dangerous road in Israel known as "The Bloody Pass." The road, at the time of this event, was really just a narrow path — a twisting, turning path with cliffs and caves on either side — lots of places for bandits to hide. The "Bloody Pass," got its name because of the violence that commonly occurred there, and in our story today, one poor man was in the wrong place at the wrong time, attacked by thieves, robbed, stripped, and left half-dead at the side of the road. He was certain to die unless he received immediate help.

Recognize it? It is one of Jesus's best-known parables — the parable of the Good Samaritan. Most of us have heard it so many times that we tend to gloss over it, thinking, "I know, I know, the Good Samaritan — help people in trouble; don't just pass them by... got it, thank you very much!"

But, let's slow down and listen to the story again - it really can change our lives.

Luke 10:25-37 NASB ... a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ And He said to him, "**What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?**" ²⁷ And he answered, "YOU SHALL 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 YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”²⁸ And He said to him, “You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE.”²⁹ But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”³⁰ Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.”³¹ “And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.”³² “Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.”³³ “But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion,³⁴ and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them*; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him.”³⁵ “On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.’”³⁶ “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands?”³⁷ And he said, “The one who showed mercy toward him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do the same.”

First, let us notice the setup for the story. What prompted Jesus to tell it in the first place? Verse 25 tells us that a lawyer wanted to “test” Jesus. In other words, this man, who knew the Old Testament extremely well, was trying to trap Jesus into saying something wrong against the Law. When he asked, “What do I have to do to inherit eternal life?”, how did Jesus respond? He said, basically, “You’re the lawyer. You’re the expert. What does the Law say?”

The expert then recited what Jesus called the two greatest commandments: “Love the Lord your God with all your

heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (see Matt. 22:36-40).

Jesus’ response to him was quick and affirmative: “Do this and you will live!” But the lawyer wasn’t happy. Instead of trapping Jesus in *His* words, he felt that *he* was the one now being trapped! So he asked a follow-up question to try to extricate himself: “OK Jesus, tell me this: who is my neighbor?” Jesus responded: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho....”, and continued on to tell a beautiful story of compassion in action.

After the man was beaten, robbed and left to die by the side of the road, three men came by, and Jesus highlighted how each of them responded to this half-dead man in his time of need.

The first two were religious people — a Jewish priest and a rabbi. They knew God’s Word. They held positions of authority in the synagogue. People looked up to them as leaders and righteous examples. And what did they do when they saw the man lying by the roadside? They “passed by on the other side.”

The third man — not a religious professional like the priest and rabbi, not even a Jew, but a hated Samaritan — stopped. Why? Because, as Jesus said, “he felt compassion.”

Not only did the Samaritan feel compassion, he took immediate action to help. He used wine and oil as antiseptics to clean the man’s wounds, then bandaged them. He put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he paid the innkeeper to care for him.

So then, Jesus asked the critical question: “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The lawyer replied, “The one who

had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do the same.”

Today, the same ‘moral of the story’ and the same responsibility lands squarely on our shoulders. The mandate to love our neighbors as ourselves is just as much the responsibility of God’s people now as it was 2,000 years ago. We must love our neighbours as ourselves! And if we ask: “Who is my neighbour”, the answer is easy: “My neighbor is anyone in need that I am in a position to help”.

Scripture has a lot to say about those who are in need — the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, those who have been discriminated against. In fact, there are more than 560 verses in the Bible that deal with the responsibility of God’s people to serve the poor and oppressed!

Here is a small sampling of them:

“Whoever is kind to the needy honors God” — Proverbs 14:31 NIV

“Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered” — Proverbs 21:13 NIV

“If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness” — Isaiah 58:10 NIV

“If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?” — 1 John 3:17 NIV

We are blessed by God when we show compassion to others, and held accountable to Him when we don’t. God has a heart for the poor, and He wants us to have the same. But just like the Good Samaritan, He wants us to move beyond having a heart for the poor and simply feeling pity. He wants us to actually take action on their behalf — in His

name! He wants us to be His hands, His feet, His love and His compassion to those in need. Theologian John Stott put it this way: **“The perspective of Scripture is not the survival of the fittest, but the protection of the weakest.”**

As we contemplate Jesus’ story, let us imagine it in today’s terms. Imagine that instead of a man left for dead on the side of the road, there is a child. This child is one of 135 million children born into our world each year to begin their journey on the road of life. For children born in Canada and other developed countries, their journey will be relatively smooth. More often than not, they will receive the nurture, protection and learning opportunities they need to survive and thrive.

However, for one-quarter of the children born each year, like the ones we have heard about today, their road of life is like the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. It is a dangerous journey as they deal with the bandits of poverty, hunger and disease. Without mercy, these bandits strike children who are the most vulnerable — at “The Bloody Pass” so to speak. Here is the tragic truth. Each and every day, nearly 27,000 children younger than five years old die from hunger, exposure and disease because no one came to their aid.

Of course, lots of people pass by them at the side of the road. Like the priest and the rabbi, many are religious people – just like you and me – believers in Jesus. They are good people trying to live godly lives. So why do they — why do we — ignore the children’s cries and pass by on the other side?

For many of us, the needs seem too great, too overwhelming, too discouraging. It’s not that we don’t care, but with nearly 1 billion people existing on less than a dollar a day, saving one solitary child from a life of

poverty just won't make a difference.

Others of us think that taking care of the world's poorest children should be left to governments and big international aid organizations.

Still others think: "I've got my hands full taking care of my own children. These others — well, they're not mine; they're not from my community; they're not even from my country. They're not my problem."

But that is not how God's Word directs us to deal with the world's poor and oppressed. Jesus' parable makes it clear that whenever we see someone in need and have the ability to help, we must.

The Good Samaritan did not pass by on the other side of the road. NO! He got involved. And he didn't just do the bare minimum — he went 'the extra mile' to help an individual in need. He used his own resources — his oil, his wine, his donkey and his money to help the wounded man. He even got others involved in caring for him. And he followed up to make sure the man made a full recovery. **And then what does Jesus tell us? "Go and do the same."**

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In 1952, the Korean War was raging and an American evangelist named Everett Swanson was on a preaching tour of Japan and Korea. He shared the gospel with thousands of troops, and by the end of the tour, he had led many to Christ. Certainly, he could have gone home satisfied that his mission had been accomplished — and accomplished well.

But something hounded Swanson and troubled him as he made his way back to the U. S. In the city of Seoul, he had noticed scores of children who were living on the streets,

orphaned by the war. They huddled together to keep warm and begged for coins. Their plight touched his heart. But one morning before departing for the States, he had an experience that did more than just touch his heart — it changed his life.

Early one morning as he was out for a walk, he glanced up as a flatbed truck stopped a few blocks up the road. Sanitation workers emerged to gather up trash from doorways, alleys and gutters along the street. They threw what appeared to be piles of rags onto the truck bed. As he came closer, Swanson noticed that the workers were kicking the rag piles before picking them up. That made sense, as rats were everywhere and the workers wanted to avoid them. One rag pile lay in a doorway not far from him, and he reached it about the same time as one of the workers. That's when he noticed that the pile was more than just a tangle of rags. A small arm extended from it, and Swanson began to make out the shape of a child sleeping underneath it. He opened his mouth to warn the worker not to kick the pile, but the words stuck in his throat as he caught sight of the rest of the cargo on the truck.

The horror of what he was witnessing suddenly dawned on him. The workers were not there to gather trash. They were gathering the bodies of children who had died overnight on the streets of Seoul. Those who had survived another night of the bitter Korean winter would be awakened by the kick of a sanitation worker to face another day of cold, hunger and despair. Swanson couldn't get that horrific image out of his mind, but like the rabbi and priest in Jesus' parable, he could have simply left the country and washed his hands of the whole matter — (not my children, not my country, not my problem). But he couldn't. And he didn't.

Not exactly sure how he could help them, he returned home and started asking people to commit to contributing a small amount of money each month to provide for the needs of destitute Korean orphans.

Swanson's efforts steadily grew as more and more people caught the vision to "go and do the same", as Jesus commanded. Now, more than 55 years later, what he started has become a thriving organization called Compassion International. Through the years, Compassion has enabled hundreds of thousands of people to reach out to impoverished children around the world who have been left by life's roadside.

Today, I am challenging you to catch the same vision. You can rescue a child in need, a child ravaged by the bandits of poverty and disease, by becoming a Compassion sponsor. As a sponsor, you can lift a child up from the side of the road. You can see that he or she receives food, clothing, medical care, an education and most importantly, an opportunity to hear the good news of the gospel. They can receive help for a better life here on Earth, and hope for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

As a sponsor, your own life will also be changed. You will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are following Jesus' command and pleasing your heavenly Father. Your perspective and heart for the world will expand. You will acquire a greater appreciation for life and a more thankful heart. You will experience the richness and joy of watching the child you love and support grow into a confident, productive adult — one who will eventually be able to help others also.

Let's get started today.