

Why is the Good Samaritan Good?

Luke 10:25-37; Jeremiah 33:3

7/11/10

The Good Samaritan is one of the most familiar stories in the Bible. People who don't even read the Bible or follow Jesus know this story. Hospitals and other helping organizations have borrowed the name and people are called good Samaritans, when they help someone else. Maybe you have heard someone say, "I was a good Samaritan today because I helped a lady change her tire."

Is it that simple? We just do something good and we are like the Good Samaritan?

Take the case of Los Angeles-based writer Andrew Cohn, who was cleaning up after a backyard party and found a wallet on the ground with \$40 in it. "I'd just spent \$500 on the party," says Cohn. "I figured the money was the girl's contribution." He kept the money and left the wallet, with ID and credit cards, on the ground. How did Cohn justify his actions? Well, he says, "If you expect someone's going to return your wallet with all the cash, you're probably a little delusional." Really good Samaritans, if they find a wallet, they return it intact," he says. "Some people find a wallet, take the money, but return the important stuff. That's not evil."

Things do have a way of coming back around to justice eventually. Take Andrew Cohn, for example. A few hours after he replaced the now cash-poor wallet back on the ground, the owner knocked on his door. Cohn opened the door to find a drop-dead gorgeous woman standing on his porch. Although she was sad her money was gone, she was glad to have her wallet and credit cards back. She was so glad, thought Cohn, that maybe she'd agree to go out with him. Problem is, he didn't get her number, and a mutual friend wouldn't give it to him. The friend's reason? "You can't ask out a girl if you just took her money."

Jesus tells the story to a man asking questions about inheriting eternal life. He wants to secure his eternity. This man is a Jewish lawyer. He knows the law and follows them. He believes that if he can do the right things, he will save himself. Jesus responds with a question – what is in the law. That was an easy question for the lawyer – love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor has yourself. Jesus tells him do this and you will live.

The man wants to go deeper. Loving God is clear. Who is my neighbor? Some would say loving ones family is loving your neighbor. Others expand it to include other Jewish people. The question is asking for distinction (inclusion and exclusion). Who do I need to love and who do I not need to love? The neighbor is the issue in the passage.

Remember the driving question is who are the people God expects me to love?

A man was leaving Jerusalem heading to Jericho. It was a rocky, downhill walk (a 3,000 ft. drop) over the 18 mile hike. It was known for being dangerous. This man was mugged – beaten,

robbed and left hopelessly stranded. Two people walk by on the other side – a priest and Levite (assistant to the priest). A Samaritan stopped and cared for the man's wounds, transported him to the nearest inn, and paid enough money for the man to stay several weeks.

Jesus ends this discussion with the lawyer with the question, "Who was a neighbor to the man who was attacked?" The man who showed mercy. Go and do likewise.

This is more than just helping people once in a while or even helping people who are on your path of life each day. There is something much bigger going on here than just identifying those I am supposed to love. Jesus is telling this man to become a neighbor. Don't look for your neighbor become a neighbor. It is not an exercise of finding a certain amount of people to love each day and you sleep better at night and feel confident you are in good standing with God! This is about changing the way one lives. This is not a task to do or a list to check off. Jesus is teaching about discipleship and loving all people.

Most people come back from mission trips feeling good about them. I remember taking a group of high school students from Miami to Slade, Ky. We worked on a family's home that was more like a shack – with an outhouse. I will never forget the look of some of these girls from country-club families, when I told them that is the bathroom. It was a challenging week of hard work, developing teamwork, and personal reflection of money and lifestyle. Some of these kids discovered Christ in the challenges. We all came back home feeling good about our work and about ourselves. We were on that retreat -mission trip adrenalin high. The kids spoke in church with energy and talked about commitment and life changes.

Those adrenalin highs do not last forever. As time passed, most of those kids fell back into their routines of life and thought patterns and behavior. The Good Samaritan is not about feeling better. It is about changing life – thought patterns, behavior, and motivations.

One night you were coming out of the grocery store and two men attacked, hitting you to the ground and stealing your purse (wallet, men). Your head was bleeding and your bones and muscles aching with pain. You could not get up. You called out for help. There were not many people in the parking lot. Someone getting into their car heard you but did not want to get involved. A few other cars drove by not stopping. Then a person of a different race and color came to your aid. He spoke in a different in broken English but with gentleness. He actually picked you up carrying you back into the store. The store manager called 911. The man bought some gauze and bandages to stop the bleeding and provide the proper care. The emergency response team arrived and took over. The Good Samaritan walked went on his way.

Extreme Love

The Good Samaritan is Jesus. He is the one who comes to our aid. He comes and finds us – broken, weary, sad, abandoned, confused, and lost. Jesus is the person who comes to help us with our burdens and sinfulness. As he tells this story, he is focused on Jerusalem and

preparing himself to die. He will be the ultimate Good Samaritan who gives what we need to save us. He dies on the cross and saves us from our sin.

The Good Samaritan is good because he acts like Jesus. Once you and I experience the love of Jesus Christ personally in our hearts and lives, we are empowered to love unconditionally. Make no mistake – loving unconditionally is a process of growing closer to Jesus.

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