

## TCC Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2013 – Luke 10v25-37

### **Title: “The Good Samaritan”**

### **Purpose:**

To consider:

1. A great question – “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”
2. A great test – “Which person are you in this parable?”
3. A great prize – “Only the mercy of Jesus can release us to receive eternal life and to become ourselves a good Samaritan.”

### **Introduction**

Today we come to what would have to be described as one of THE most well-known stories in the whole Bible – in fact it is so well-known that we even name organisations after it and have adopted its title as a phrase in common parlance – it is that story, EXCLUSIVE to Luke’s Gospel – the story of the Good Samaritan.

Before we go any further then – let us hear how this story begins (and if you’re following at home this is taken from Luke and chapter 10 commencing at verse 25 through to 29).

\*\*\* READ Luke 10v25-29 \*\*\*

### Chess

I don’t know whether you’ve ever played much chess in your time – but I have to say that this whole episode with Jesus and the Law expert – really reminds me of the typical stages that a game of chess might go through:

- FIRST – you have the OPENING GAMBIT – that first move
- THEN – you have a COUNTERMOVE - and bit by bit both players negotiate their initial positions
- Following this – is what we might classify as the MIDGAME – and here a combination of a **good start and a good strategy** will hopefully mean that the end stage will led by you
- So LAST up then – the ENDGAME and here success will mean the CHECKMATE of your opponent

For our time, I am going to take us through the “**give and take**” of these stages and to be sure there is certainly plenty of “**cut and thrust**”.

Elie Wiesel

In an interview with the Jewish novelist and writer on spirituality Elie Vee-sel - the interviewer said:

"I have noticed that you Jews often answer questions by asking another question. Why do you do that?"

To which Vee-sel replied: "Why not?" !!

And Jesus likewise has what can only be described as "conversational brilliance" - he would not be fazed by a Parkinson or by a Jeremy Paxman.

### **1] The Opening Gambit**

So let's get into our game of chess and the opening gambit.

#### A good question

To be fair to the man who comes to interview Jesus - his opening move, the question he brings - is a very good question:

He says "Teacher - what must I do to inherit eternal life?" - and it is, of course, not the only time that this question comes up in Scripture.

#### Hidden agendas

Jesus reads the man and the real intent behind the question. He knows that this is **\*NOT\*** a straight question and therefore he equally does **\*NOT\*** give a straight answer - he turns the question back on the questioner - after all this man is an "**expert in the Law**".

By letting the man speak for himself, Jesus - and everyone listening in the crowd, would slowly see the man reveal himself.

Q. So what did the man want? He clearly wasn't fishing for new information - his answer reveals that he knows the correct ORTHODOX answer according to the Torah, the first five books of the bible.

His response was perfect; "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 our neighbour as yourself."

Jesus takes the wind out of his sails, puts him on the back foot and deftly replies "You have answered correctly" - "Do this and you will live."

Now clearly this could have been an end to the interview, the man could have quietly sneaked off - somewhat easily out-manouevred - but he had not achieved what he wanted. Jesus had not been drawn out at all, Jesus had not been helped to say something that was UNORTHODOX and for which he could be justly accused and thus discredited or preferably disposed of.

#### Letting the Scriptures do the talking

It is worth noting that Jesus is very happy to let the Holy Scriptures do the talking. He is more than content to let this man, regardless of his less than above board intentions, quote the Old Testament scriptures. This is a helpful reminder that the Words of Scriptures do not need our help - we are not the ones that give Scripture their power.

Charles Spurgeon was a great preacher in London in the 19c and he famously described Scripture as a lion - he said "**Defend the Bible? Would you defend a lion? Loose him; and let him go!**"

It challenges us all to remember that although we have opinions of our own, these must never become more prominent or more strongly voiced than that which the Bible itself says.

### Facing his own question

The man wasn't an honest enquirer - and so Jesus helps him to face his own question honestly.

This is an invariable path - God would have us to be convicted before ever we might be converted. Conviction OF SIN precedes conversion FROM SIN.

Notice however that Jesus never sets out to HUMILIATE the man - exposed yes humiliated never.

It does us good ultimately, although we don't like it at the time to be allowed to "stew in the juices" of our own sin. Without this we will never come to see or accept our true predicament before an all-holy God.

### One size does \*NOT\* fit all

Just as there is \*not\* one size that fits all - similarly there is \*not\* one script that fits all.

Q. How do you answer a lawyer - a legalist? Well with the law of course.

This is his specialist subject, this is the hallowed home turf.

And this is where we begin with everyone - exactly where they are - there really isn't anywhere else to start. And it would be very easy to see Jesus and others using this very policy whenever people have an encounter that ultimately leads them through to a saving faith in Christ.

Perhaps if the situation had been very different and it were a libertarian that had come to Jesus, then maybe he would have looked at the fruit of their freedom to allow conviction to settle in.

### The real issue

Q. So what was the real issue for this man that he started to feel?

The man recognised what the Psalm writer expressed in Psalm 130 (v3)

"If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins - O LORD, who could stand?"

Jesus wants to take steps to explode the notion that - "Man's best efforts will, in the end, be enough to get him into God's heaven."

## **2] The MIDGAME**

This is where we arrive at the MIDGAME in this game of verbal chess - and the Lawyer comes with another strategy and second line of attack, as it were.

The story goes on and we read **"...he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus: 'And who is my neighbour?'"**

I guess we all use this ploy sometimes - trying to perhaps wriggle out of something on a technicality - using theoretical questions as a kind of smoke screen for facing up to the full force or weight of something.

This brings us to the real heart of our story and we are going to hear read for us the story or parable of the Good Samaritan.

**\* READ THE GOOD SAMARITAN \***

We've been talking about this encounter that Jesus is having with an expert in the Law - he has set out to trip Jesus up and to interrogate him with a view to trapping him.

Jesus, reading the man's intentions and his true needs, is turning his questions around and making the questioner the questioned.

### Background

Let me fill in a little of the background for this story that Jesus tells in order to make his point and to answer the question about "Who is my neighbour?"

Jerusalem is around 3,000 feet above sea level and this road - the Jericho road goes from there down hill all the way to the plains of the Dead Sea which is itself 1,000 feet below sea level.

And so it truly is a road that goes DOWN. Not only is it a road that goes DOWN DOWN, it is a road that shout DANGER DANGER - so very many twists and turns, narrow rocky passage ways where there were caves where thieves could lurk and prey on there rather isolated and helpless victims.

To put it into modern terms, this Jericho road was like a dark alley at night in a deserted & deprived inner city area.

We should also bear in mind that the hero of this story is one who is a despised Samaritan. The Jews had a very long-standing hatred of the Samaritans and the antagonism was something very much shared.

### A series of twists in the story

So many times Jesus chooses the medium of story or parable through which to teach lessons that impact us.

Q. Why is that? Well part of the reason is that a story is something that usually we can easily identify with.

Not only that - a good story will have something of a plot to go with it - and this story is no different.

Just as the road down to Jericho had many twists and turns, so also this story has many surprises one after another.

### Twist #1 - surely help is at hand

So we come to the first twist in the story - the man has been beaten up and left for dead - and of course this was not exactly anything very new - in fact Jesus' story here could have been based on a real story - however, when we see the Priest coming round the bend we say to ourselves - Help is at hand! Praise God - that man was so nearly a goner - had the cold of night fall descended - an badly injured man with no covering at all - he is not exactly going to fare well.

The priest spies the man and "passed by on the other side".

Q. Now why would he do this? Was it because he was a despised Samaritan and so he might be thinking - good! He probably only got what he deserved!

Well this is not really so likely - given this was their own very Jewish road.

More likely it was down to the priest's own consecration. He was very likely concerned that if he touches this man, who may well be dead, then he will (as the Law of Moses says) be unclean and unfit for duty for a period of 7 days.

He cannot risk that and so quickly passes by.

#### Twist #2 - surely this time

Very quickly on the heels of this bad turn of events comes another one.

This time we have a Levite who also happens to be coming down the road - pretty lucky for this unlucky victim.

Now a Levite, unless he was descended from Aaron's line, was not a priest, he did however work in the service of the temple and so in our own day we might think of him as perhaps a sidesman in a church or perhaps a deacon, a lay preacher.

Surely help is here this time. UNBELIEVABLE! He too - "passes by on the other side" - Surely this cannot be happening - we might say.

I guess we should not be too quick to condemn this 2nd guy - quite possibly he was thinking very pragmatically - maybe this man lying on the road was bait and the thieves were using this as some distraction tactic. Maybe, the reality was that this man's blood spilt on the road was fresh and that could only mean one thing, the culprits were not far away - better hurry on quickly and quietly!!

So a couple of twists in our storyline - but Jesus is not quite done with the surprises and the twists:

#### Twist #3 - a Samaritan

The name Samaritan in our day is a positive one - someone who gives themselves to help any that would cry out for assistance.

In Jesus' day and in Jewish circles, the word "Samaritan" was a pejorative. You only have to look to John's gospel and chapter 8 where the Jews say to Jesus - **"Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed!"**

So it was totally unexpected that Jesus should introduce a Samaritan on this Jewish road and have him to be the one who would showcase true compassion and care and sacrificial love.

### A case study in being a neighbour

What we have here in short measure is a case study in what it means to be a neighbour:

- he saw not just a set of needs but another human being - one made in the image of God
- in a very real sense he allowed himself to enter that dying man's world - to feel the desperation of his plight - to feel the cold of the wind on his unprotected body - the throbbing of his open wounds - the dryness of his mouth, perhaps filled with the grit of the road
- he looked beyond surface considerations - the inevitable disturbance to his own plans, the fact that this man was most likely a Jew, one he would not naturally get along with, that he also was now putting himself in harms wayIt does make us think a bit about what our charity looks like.

### Fire and forget!

It does make us think about what our charity, our compassion looks like. Perhaps we like the "fire and forget" style of Samaritan work - a bit like an exocet missile - we give some money, perhaps a dozen clicks on a website and we can walk away - job done!

It's done once - done at a distance - done, done!

### 3] The close to CHECKMATE

Jesus brings this interview to its necessary conclusion - and Jesus asks a question, to which the answer is really inescapable - there is no square on the chess board to which he may now evade the answer.

Jesus says to him so: Q. "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

"The expert in the Law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.'" - Jesus told him "Go and do likewise."

Jesus has passed the test, has avoided the trap set for him and in the process has turned things around so that the questioner has been the questioned and the hunter the hunted.

Q. So what do we learn?

Q. What exactly is the point we should be seeing in all of this - or is it just a fascinating story and the point is only whatever you fancy making it?

## **CONCLUSION**

There are in this parable, as we stand back and look it over three things:

1. FIRST A **great question** – “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

A can't think of any greater question that one can ask in life.

I think we do well to notice that this religious expert, this law man, has it both **RIGHT** – without knowing it AND equally **WRONG** without knowing it:

He says “What must I **DO**... to inherit eternal life?” – this is such a common belief, that surely to gain the approval of God, we must do our part – that we must give of our best and then hopefully this will be enough – but it won't. Here what Scripture says:

The apostle Paul says (Romans 3v19-20) *“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”*

Our every attempt at living up to the Law only shows us that none of us can keep it – the Law is like a policeman that makes us conscious of our sin.

Q. So what can you **do**? You can **DO** nothing to gain, to make yourself fitted to receive eternal life.

Second, he says: “What must I do to **INHERIT** eternal life?” – without knowing it he has **hit on the key** – eternal life is a gift from first to last through faith from first to last (\*not\* works from first to last).

As the apostle Paul says (Romans 6v23) *“...the wages of sin is death, but the **gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

I have heard it put this way: “In the gospel we discover that we are far more wicked than we ever dared believe AND far more loved than we ever dared hope.”

So we have a great question.

2. NEXT A **great test** – “Which person are you in this parable?”

Now clearly we all know which person Jesus is telling us that we are to be – we are to be the one who showed that he had true neighbour love. We are to be the one who fulfils the 2<sup>nd</sup> great commandment to love your neighbour as yourself.

There are more ways than one to **miss out on the saving grace of God** – let me broad brush this

and give you two: a non-religious good neighbour **OR** a religious non-good neighbour

We can be a **non-religious good neighbour** – and with this we a form of righteousness from our good social deeds (however we put aside the need to love God with all our hearts and souls and minds and strength).

We can be a **religious non good neighbour**- and here we dot the l's and cross the t's of our religiousness and yet we demonstrate that we do not have any changed heart within – there is no outflow of the love of Jesus to authenticate the presence of any true faith. Just as self-righteous as the non-religious version.

Being in a church a lot, or around church people – doesn't make you **OR** them, for that matter, a true Christian, only Christ and his work on our behalf can do that.

A great question, a great test -

3. **FINALLY A great power** – Q. Where do we get the power, to love our neighbour in this completely sacrificial manner?

Let me suggest that we can only become a true Samaritan as Jesus suggests, after we have experienced the Good Samaritan.

We do not have what it takes to give until we have first received.

As we read in **1<sup>st</sup> John 4v19** "We love because he first loved us."

The love of Jesus must first flood our lives, we experience being that man half dead on the road and that actually is where we all begin – recognizing that sin touches us all, and sins has left the whole human race half-dead – yes alive in body, but initially dead in our spiritual side.

Only Jesus, can come and clothe us with his robe of righteousness, pour on our wounds the wine of his shed blood and give to us the reviving oil of His Holy Spirit.

If you have never been the man half-dead, then it strikes me, that however kind a person you are in your nature, however much you might strive to prove yourself.

"Only the mercy of THE Good Samaritan can revive us and then resource us to become ourselves another a good Samaritan."

AMEN