

Welcome back to our summer series in the Parables of Jesus. My name is Dillon if we haven't met yet and it is a pleasure to be with you this morning. Jesus was an incredible teacher and the parable was one of his favorite tools for taking every day life kinds of things and using them to teach spiritual truth. This morning we come to one of the most recognized parables in the Bible. The Good Samaritan. I'm guessing you have all heard of it before right? Even if you hadn't heard of the parable you probably would have heard of Good Samaritan laws. All 50 states have them in some form or another. Good Samaritan laws protect people who come to the assistance of others during an emergency, be it a medical emergency or some other kind of emergency. Unfortunately sometimes things go wrong when people try to help, and good Samaritan laws protect people so they don't have to worry about being sued because they were just trying to help.

Since just about everyone knows the story of the Good Samaritan, I have to ask the question; how do we approach a story or passage that seems so familiar and well known? How do we have a fresh perspective as we come to the text this morning? I think when we approach the familiar, we have to ask God for fresh eyes and a tender heart. Even though we know this story so well God can always teach us something new. So let's do that this morning, let's ask God for fresh eyes and tender hearts towards his word. Let's pray.

Unlike many other parables, where Jesus is teaching about a specific subject or he links two or three parables together, this parable is part of a conversation. It unfolds in three parts or sections. I'm calling this first part of the conversation "The Setup." Let's read verses 25-28.

When I read the word Lawyer I tend to think of a prosecutor or a defense attorney. I think of a courtroom where lawyers are arguing with each other. I'm not sure this man was the same kind of lawyer. He was an expert on the law of God, the Torah. So think more about a constitutional lawyer and less like a criminal court. I'm going to call this man the Expert for this sermon, so we don't get confused with the court system.

Whoever this expert on Torah law is, he is trying to set Jesus up. He is trying to get Jesus to say something controversial so that the Pharisees and Sadducees and other religious leaders can condemn Jesus for heresy or blasphemy or whatever. But Jesus doesn't take the bait. He's not falling for it. The Expert asks a very important question. What must I do to inherit eternal life? Hold on to that question this morning. What must I do?

Every pastor, every Sunday school teacher, every Awana leader, missionary, we are always so excited when someone asks us this question. What must I do, what do I need to do to go to heaven? Why? Because it's an invitation to share the gospel, to talk about Jesus and all that he has done for us. If someone really wants to know how to go to heaven and they have the courage to ask, it's an open door for a genuine conversation. One of the most exciting conversations possible.

But, remember for Jesus this is a setup. The Expert didn't really want to know the answer. So instead of jumping in with an answer, Jesus pushed back. He didn't take the bait, he pushed back and asked, "how about you tell me what you think? What does the law say? How do you read and interpret it." Since you are an expert and all.

And the Expert give Jesus a really good answer. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. These two statements are found in the Old Testament. The first is Deuteronomy 6:4-5 "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." And the second one is Leviticus 19:17-18 "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with

your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."

Jesus seems to be impressed with this answer. He said to the expert "you have answered correctly. Do this and you will live." Underline those two little words. "Do this" The Expert asked the question, what shall I do, then he gave an answer, and Jesus agreed. Do this and you shall live. This Expert said nearly the exact same words Jesus himself used in Mark 12:28 when he was asked what is the greatest commandment. Jesus quoted the same two Old Testament passages.

Now if this had been a sincere person asking a sincere question I think the conversation would be over. Seems like everyone is in agreement. But remember this is a setup. And so far it isn't working very well for the Expert. So he tries again. Desiring to justify himself, he asked Jesus. . . and who is my neighbor?

I must have read this parable ten times this week before those words caught my attention. "Desiring to justify himself." I read this passage ten times and I just figured the Expert was an arrogant knucklehead who was losing a debate with Jesus and was trying again to trap him in his words. That might be true. Then it finally hit me. Dillon how often do you try to justify yourself before God? I think I do it more than I would care to admit. In the broadest sense I try to justify myself by earning God's favor. I've been a Christ follower for a lot of years and I still try to do what is right so that God will like me or accept me. It makes me crazy. I know that God's love is unconditional and abundant, he loves me with an abounding steadfast love, but I'm still trying to earn it, still trying to justify his favor. More specifically in try to justify my actions and attitudes. Whether it's an obedience issue or an attitude problem, if I'm in the wrong and don't want to repent I'll try to justify. I'll argue that it isn't that big of a deal, that God doesn't really care, that it isn't my fault I'm just tired or stressed or whatever. If I'm not ready to change I'll try to justify myself. In this way I am no different than the expert on the law that was confronting Jesus. Do you guys ever try this? Justifying behavior? If you

are willing to take an honest look at yourself, ask the question, How do I try to justify myself before God? But be careful, you might not like the answer.

The Expert is trying to justify himself. His first question didn't work so he asked a second question. He tried again. Who is my neighbor? If you read the Leviticus 19 passage very narrowly it seems to suggest that the command is merely to love your kin, your fellow Israelites and those who have converted to the faith. So the real question is, can I just love my fellow Jews or do I have to love everyone? That's the real question. Do I have to love everyone or just the people I like? The people who are like me?

You see by this time in history, Israel is no longer the land of the Israelites, it is Palestine. It has been invaded and conquered by multiple nations including the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks and Romans. People from all over the world are living in the land and bringing their religions and idols and cultures with them and showing very little respect for the Jews or for their God. So the question is loaded. The Expert wants to know, does he really have to love all of these people or is God just talking about loving his Jewish neighbors. It's a loaded question.

Jesus answers with his parable. This is the second part of the conversation, I'm calling it The Story. Let's read the story together. (READ v 29-35).

The man in the story is anonymous. No name, no features, no description or status, nothing. Just a human on a journey. Jericho is a well know and important city, about 20 or so miles from Jerusalem. Mostly down hill. It would take someone a really long day to walk. It was also known as a dangerous, somewhat desolate road especially if you are journeying alone. Again, parables were told from normal everyday life stuff.

The man in the story was jumped, beaten, robbed and left for dead in the road. It must have happened all the time on the road to Jericho. It's like

getting your car broken into in San Francisco. It's not good, but it happens all the time. It goes with the territory so to speak.

Now things get interesting when Jesus introduces the Priest and the Levite. He brings them into the story the same way. Each one came along the road, saw the man, then passed by on the other side. What do these people represent? Who are they? Each of them was born into positions of power and status. They represented the upper class of Jewish society and religious authority. Their status was tied to the temple and to worshiping God there. In this way they represented the legal and moral authority of Judaism. These were upper class kinds of people. And each of them, when seeing a man suffer, chose to ignore him and scurry away.

The plot thickens when a Samaritan comes along on the road. Samaritans were despised by the Jews. They were looked down on, shunned, disliked, unwanted. The Samaritans lived in the region of Samaria, to the North of Judea and Jerusalem. They were ethnically and religiously Jewish. They had the same ancestors, same language, same scriptures, same laws, they were very similar culturally. The biggest difference is that they believed that the tabernacle was first set up on Mt. Gerizim, to the north, and therefore, that was the proper place of worship. The Samaritans did not participate in worship in Jerusalem or in the temple because they worshiped on Gerizim, and they were rejected by the Jews because of it. They were cultural and religious outsiders.

So here comes this Samaritan man, this outcast. He came along the same road, and he saw the beaten and robbed man but notice this difference: he had compassion. This is the most important word in the whole parable. Compassion is to show great affection or love for someone, and to feel sympathy toward them. In Matthew 9:36 "When (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

True compassion calls us to action. The Samaritan didn't just feel sorry for the man, he did something to help. He treated his wounds, put him on his

donkey, took him to an inn, cared for him and then paid for additional care. All of this while still traveling on a dangerous road putting himself at great risk along the way. What the Samaritan modeled for us is true compassion. Feeling sorry for someone is not the same as compassion. I think we trick ourselves into believing that we are compassionate people when we feel sorry for someone but that's not compassion, that's just a feeling. The Priest and the Levite might have felt sorry for this man as he lay in the dirt but they didn't have compassion.

I like to read the news. Do any of you read the news or watch the news? I like to read the news. And we all know that bad news sells better than good news so the news is mostly bad. Like 95 percent bad news right? And all of that bad news can be really overwhelming can't it? Between the politics, the scandals, the murders, the natural disasters, everyday, full of bad news and terrible things happening to people and we start to get a little numb. I feel like I've been desensitized to the pain and heartache of real people because there is just so much of it in the world, or at least it feels that way when I read the news. I might read about a landslide somewhere and hundreds of people are missing, whole communities washed away and I think, oh that's terrible, how sad. Maybe I'll pray a little prayer. Then I go on and read the next article and forget all about those people who are suffering. I know, I'm a terrible pastor. I might feel sorry for someone for a minute, but that is not true compassion. Compassion calls us to action.

Jesus uses this story to highlight what true compassion is, and how the Samaritan demonstrated love in a tangible way. But this isn't the end of the passage. There is still one more part of the conversation. First we had the Setup, then the Story and I'm calling this last part: The Lesson. Look at verses 36-37. (Read Passage).

Now Jesus is the one with a question and the Expert answered it correctly. It wasn't the Priest or the Levite, the people with authority and status who acted like a neighbor, it was the outsider, the outcast, the shunned, the Samaritan, who loved a broken human enough to do

something. The expert said "The one who showed mercy" acted like a neighbor. Mercy, in many ways is a synonym of compassion. Among humans, mercy is kindness or concern expressed for someone in need. God shows his mercy and kindness most clearly through Christ. Ephesians 2:4 "But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when you were dead in transgressions, it is by grace you have been saved. To love your neighbor is to show compassion and mercy to them.

The last thing Jesus said brings us full circle in the conversation. Remember it started when the Expert tried to setup Jesus. He asked "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Now Jesus answers with a clear command. "you go and do likewise." Go and do. Go and love with compassion. Jesus is telling us to show compassion and mercy to the people around us. This is a command, not a suggestion. This is consistent with what God has made this clear throughout human history and throughout scripture. Micah 6:6-8 Micah asks what God wants of him. "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? Then the Lord answers : "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

What can we take away from this passage this morning? What do we "Go and Do?" how do we wrestle with the magnitude of what God is calling us to. I've got a few observations.

1. First, Let's remember how we have been shown compassion. Each one of us was once like the beaten and robbed man. We were helpless and dead in our sin and in our need for redemption, but because of God's mercy and compassion he saved us. He brought us back to life, he clothed us with his forgiveness and grace, and he has filled us with his Spirit that we may walk with him and commune with him. God didn't

have to do these things, but he chose to. Remember how others have come alongside you in your time of need. Providing medical assistance, emotional support, financial help, counseling, whatever it was. Remember how you have been loved and helped in your time of need.

2. Next recognize our ability to help others. I understand that it is impossible to meet all of the needs of everyone who is struggling or suffering. It is simply too much. Jesus didn't even heal all the sick or feed all the hungry during his earthly ministry, how could we possibly care for all the need in the world? But, we can show compassion to the person who God puts in our path. God is not asking us to help everyone, He is telling us to show compassion to the one right in front of us. It might cost us time, money or comfort to show compassion, that's ok. God gave us our time, our money and our comfort, so he can ask us to give some of it away to others.

3. Thirdly, Rely on the Holy Spirit. The ability to show compassion does not come from within ourselves, it comes from the overflow of God's love for us. We can love because he first loved us. If you are going to actually get down in the dirt and help someone in a meaningful way you are going to need the help of the Spirit. Sometimes it is really difficult to know how to help. It is hard to know if giving cash to a homeless person is helping or hurting. I work with Debbie in the office and we handle every request for benevolence. The question we are always asking is "will this actually help the person?" And we pray a lot for wisdom to know how to help in a meaningful and compassionate way. Sometimes the help people need is emotional, relational, discipleship help. We need the Spirit to give us the words to speak and the wisdom to know how love and care.

4. Fourthly: Resist the urge to judge people or label them. Sometimes when we see people in really difficult circumstances we make snap judgments of them. We see a homeless person and assume they are an addict. And while that might be true, it doesn't make them less human. Some of the power of this parable is how the Samaritan overcame the



prejudices of his society to show compassion. We can't let our own prejudices get in the way of being compassionate Christ followers. I know it is easier to help people who look like me, dress like me, sound like me and vote like me. It's easier to help the people we feel connected to in some way. But God is calling us to rise above our own judgments and the divisions in our culture and see people for what they truly are, human beings, made in God's image, in need of love, compassion and mercy.

5. Lastly: Reach out for help if you are struggling. Please ask for help. Don't wait until you are half dead on the side of the road. I know we carry a lot of pride in us and it can be hard to ask for help but the church wants to be here for you and come alongside you in your time of need. We can't know how to help if you don't ask. So please reach out for help if you are struggling.

This parable teaches us what it means to "love your neighbor as yourself." It is done through compassion and mercy. Compassion demands action, it's not just a feeling. And that compassionate action just might be what God uses to tear down barriers and open a way for his truth to shine into the heart of a desperate, hurting person.

Let's pray, and then Mark and his team will close us in worship.