

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Ben Wright

Our Lord was the Master Teacher. One of the teaching tools He used was that of the parable. The parable has been defined as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus would use a parable when attempting to get some spiritual truth across to His audience or in answer to a question. Recorded for us in Luke chapter ten is the parable of the good Samaritan. Jesus was asked by a man who his neighbor was that he was to love as himself. The man did this in order to try and show that he was righteous, which is the idea of the word justify found in verse 29 (The Complete Word Study New Testament, pg. 905). Jesus, using this parable, laid out very plainly who was the neighbor of this man and all men, including us.

From this parable we first see that our neighbor is not one that has to look or talk like us. The Samaritans and Jews did not get along with one another at all. There were great religious differences between the two groups. There were also racial differences between the two. Jews would walk around the area of Samaria in order not to have to be near the Samaritans. This despite the fact that added a great deal of distance to their journey. This Samaritan saw someone who was not like him and still helped the Jew despite these differences.

Racism, classism, sexism and any other discriminatory actions are sinful according to this parable. If we hold an idea that keeps us from being a neighbor, it is an idea that needs to be discarded immediately. Every individual with whom we come into contact has a soul, regardless of their race, social position or economic status. This is something our young people need to learn while in school with a diverse group of students. This is something Christians in the business world need to learn while hiring someone for a job. This is something Christians need to learn in all walks of life. Man is made in the image of God, having an eternal soul (Genesis 1:27). We must never be guilty of being unneighborly to anyone because we sin when we do.

From this parable we also see that my neighbor is one in need of compassion. The Samaritan found this man lying on the side of the road. He was wounded and in need of medical attention. He was unable to care for himself and needed compassion shown to him by someone. Care and aid was given this man by the Samaritan because he did not see someone unlike him, he simply saw someone in need of compassion, which is the idea of showing pity or sympathy (Strong's Concordance).

Several times in the gospel accounts, we read of Jesus having compassion on someone or some group. He had compassion on the multitudes that followed him, which caused Him to feed them (Mark 8:2ff). He had compassion on the man who had been possessed by the demons known as "Legion" (Mark 5:1-19). What is extremely interesting is that each time compassion was shown by our Lord, it was more than being emotional. It was shown in His actions. He fed the multitude and healed the man possessed. In the parable under consideration, the Samaritan had compassion and showed it by taking care of the one who had been beaten. Compassion is an action, biblically speaking, not an emotion.

From this parable we also see that my neighbor is one I can go out of my way to help. No doubt it took time away from other business the Samaritan had to help this man. It took money out of

his pocket to pay for the man's care. Most certainly, he had to go out of his way to help this man.

Being a neighbor is not always easy. When someone is in need of compassion, it takes effort to meet that need. When someone is not like me, but in need of help, it takes effort to give that help. Being a neighbor takes effort and is difficult, but God expects us to do it, therefore it is possible, else God would not ask us to do such.

We also see from this parable that my neighbor is one who is in need of mercy. As the parable closes, Jesus asked the man who was attempting to justify himself, "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?" (Luke 10:36). The man answered correctly when he replied, "He that showed mercy on him" (Luke 10:37). According to Strong's, mercy is helping one who is afflicted or seeking aid.

There are those around us who are afflicted and seeking aid every day. According to Zodhiates, mercy specifically carries the idea of "special and immediate regard to the misery which is the consequence of sins" (The Complete Word Study Of The New Testament, pg. 911). Those who are lost are definitely afflicted. They have a sin problem and need to seek aid, whether they no it or not. We show mercy when we teach someone the gospel. We show mercy when we help alleviate the burdens of life with which people may be dealing.

Who is our neighbor? He is one who does not have to be like me socially, racially, religiously or economically. He is one who is in need of compassion. He is one for whom I can go out of my way to help. He is one who is in need of mercy. It does not take a Solomon to see that everyone, at some point, fits one of these descriptions. Thus, all men are our neighbors. May we as God's people realize this and act accordingly.