

“God’s Heart for the Poor and Oppressed”

Luke 10:25-37

September 19, 2004

Dr. Jerry Nelson

Luke 10:25-37

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.

"Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

<sup>LK 10:26</sup> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

<sup>LK 10:27</sup> He answered: " '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 your neighbor as yourself.' "

<sup>LK 10:28</sup> "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

<sup>LK 10:29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

<sup>LK 10:30</sup> In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

<sup>LK 10:36</sup> "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

<sup>LK 10:37</sup> The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

He had stood nearby listening for some time.

He is intrigued with what he hears from Jesus, but in his mind he is also debating.

He is dressed his part – he’s a scribe of the Mosaic Law, an expert in such matters of the Jewish law and on his forehead he wears the little black phylactery containing Deuteronomy y6.

He’s educated, bright, self-assured and respected (mostly by himself).

There is a pause in Jesus’ words to his disciples and so the expert stands up.

(See Lloyd John Ogilvie, [The autobiography of God](#), 230)

"Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

LK 10:26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

LK 10:27 He answered: " `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 your neighbor as yourself.' "

As most of you know this is what the Jews calls the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:5) with the addition of the command to love one’s neighbor (Leviticus 19:18).

LK 10:28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

Jesus is not advocating a legalism as if teaching that by obeying the law you make yourself acceptable to God.

But he is teaching that true love for God and others results in action.

The legal expert had a choice to make at this point. He could have admitted that such a standard cannot be kept and asked Jesus to grant him grace.

But instead he tries to justify himself by suggesting that if you bend the definitions sufficiently, you can meet the standard by limiting the standards.

And so he asks: v29 "And who is my neighbor?"

This expert hears the implications in Jesus words that he is supposed to practice what he teaches but desiring to justify his inaction he tries to complicate the command by suggesting that the definition of “neighbor” is ambiguous.

While love for one's relatives and those other Jews who were of the same denomination (to use our terms) was obvious, it wasn't so obvious who else might be included, he argues.

In fact, the priest is saying there are people who are not our "neighbors," people for whom we have no responsibility.

She was probably in her late teens, though she looked much older. and she was unbelievably dirty.

She was barely dressed in a filthy wrap of some kind that hung from her shoulders.

Her hair was thickly matted; her face streaked and her lips moved with no sound.

On her hip was what looked like a two-year-old child, naked and as filthy as she was.

It was a crowded pedestrian street corner near the train station in New Delhi, India.

There were thousands of people, swirling through the market where everything from fruit to bicycle parts was being sold in the crush of people.

Because it was a market area, there was a great deal of food for sale but it was obvious that this woman was getting none of it.

Every time she even came near a stall with food, she would be shooed away like some dog on the loose.

I followed her at a distance, desiring to give her some money but not wanting others to see the donation, lest they steal it.

I must have watched for nearly five minutes, looking for an opportunity.

It became obvious to me that the woman was mentally deficient, maybe even mentally ill.

Every so often she would break out into harsh words spoken into the air and others would sidestep her, as if afraid.

Amidst the collection of garbage on the crowded street someone had thrown a rotten piece of fruit.

When she spotted it, she snatched it as if a prize.

As she brought it to her mouth to eat, the child grabbed at it, getting a piece while getting slapped, as mother and child each jammed the garbage into their mouths.

My heart was already heavy but it nearly broke as I saw the desperation acted out before my own eyes.

I saw my opportunity and held out a large Rupee note to her.

Without looking at me, she grabbed it and slipped into the crowd as if she had stolen it.

Who is my neighbor?

Several years ago, I was working at night at the coffee house which was part of the Marion Street project of Mile High Ministries that we of Southern Gables helped start.

It was easily 10:30 or 11:00 at night when I spotted a child that couldn't have been more than 4 years of age darting across the street and into a back alley.

I was shocked that such a young child could be out so late at night with no apparent supervision.

But I was informed that such children often ran the streets at night because, while they had a place to sleep, there was no one there and such kids, even at that tender age, were largely on their own most of the day and night.

There were no fathers and the crack-head mothers were usually in no condition to care for them.

Having children of my own, I couldn't handle the imaginations that flooded my mind.

My very chest became heavy as I thought of THAT child – who would love him, who would protect him, who would care that he even existed?

Who is my neighbor?

The expert in the Law of Moses, stood there looking rather smug as he thought how simplistic Jesus' reply was that he should simply go and love God and love his neighbor.

This man knew it was more complicated than that; in such a huge world, with so many people and so many poor people, surely we have to make choices.

And so he tries to obfuscate the issue by asking, “Who is my neighbor?”

And to that Jesus responds with this now famous story – a story for all times, a story for us.

LK 10:30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

<sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

I could imagine Jesus pausing at this point just to let it sink in.

Do you think the expert standing before Jesus, got the message?

Most of you know Jesus couldn’t have selected a more unlikely candidate to be the good guy in the story, than a Samaritan.

The lawyer standing before Jesus felt he had every right to despise Samaritans – they were the wrong religion, the wrong culture, the wrong race, the wrong everything.

A lot of people may be his neighbors, but not them.

“Max Mueller has written that to the Greek every foreigner was a ‘barbarian’; to the Jew, every stranger was a ‘gentile dog’; and to the (Muslims) every alien was an ‘infidel’. Then Jesus came, and erased these condemning titles from the dictionaries of man, and wrote in their stead, ‘neighbor’.” (In George Buttrick, The Parables of Jesus, 153)

Do you think he was irked that Jesus used a priest like him and another religious leader, a Levite, to illustrate the bad guys in the story?

Do you think he picked up on the fact that the very thing he said he believed about loving his neighbor as himself, this Samaritan actually did.

Dwight Moody once said, "I may hire a man to do work, but I can never hire a man to do MY work." (W.R. Moody, The life of Dwight L. Moody, 195)

I think Jesus let it sink in, and then he asked:

V 36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

Jesus changes the question.

The self-righteous questioner had asked, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus changed it to, "Who is being a neighbor?"

He changes the changes the question from "Who ought to receive my help," to "Am I the kind of person who helps?"

Do you think the expert noticed that the one qualifying virtue of the Samaritan was that he had compassion on the injured man?

In contrast to the legal expert, who wanted to nit-pick about the definition of "neighbor", this Samaritan looked past religion, race, economic status, inconvenience, expense, and even danger and saw a human being in need.

That's God's heart for the poor.

There are 172 uses of the word "poor" in the NIV translation of the Older and Newer Testaments.

The Bible is filled with expressions of God's great compassion for the disadvantaged.

Throughout the Older Testament God declares his protection of the poor.

Psalm 35:10 "My whole being will exclaim,

"Who is like you, O LORD?  
You rescue the poor from those too strong for them,  
the poor and needy from those who rob them."

He demands that his people protect and care for the poor.

Proverbs 31:8-9 "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

He warns of his judgment on those who don't help the poor.

Ezekiel 16:49 "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.

Proverbs 21:13 "If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.

The Newer Testament even more dramatically demonstrates our God's compassion for the poor when God himself, in the person of his Son, Jesus shows his compassion.

Matthew 14:14 "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, **he** had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Matthew 20:34 Of two blind men: "Jesus had compassion **on** them and touched their eyes.

Mark 1:41 Of the man with leprosy: "Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.

And the greatest demonstration of God's compassion:

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him will never perish but have eternal life."

And so the issue is not really who is my neighbor but am I a neighbor?

Do I have God's heart for the poor and oppressed?

And so Jesus asked, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

LK 10:37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

The priest got it!

And just in case **we** missed it, James adds:

James 2:14-17 "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? <sup>15</sup>

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup>

If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

And so Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Will he? Will we?

Today is the second of several messages wherein I desire to set forth an agenda for our church for the next 15 months, through the end of 2005. We call it, "Gables, the Kingdom and 2005"

Our desire is that by the end of 2005 we will be making:

**A strategic, significant and sustained investment of time and money, individually and corporately, both locally and internationally to address the needs of the poor and the oppressed.**

And that very soon we will have a fully functioning mobilization ministry called "Compassion Unleashed" to mobilize and encourage individuals and groups within our church to pursue God's promptings to reach out to the poor and oppressed.

It is already happening because many of you have God's heart for the poor.

Dr. Ed and Nancy Manring with the help of some of you are already ministering through a pregnancy center and Manrings also are heading up a ministry in Nigeria to work with aids patients.

John and Arlene Nelson are already involved in a ministry to Hispanic inmates and their families in the jails of our city.

Jack Carruth, Will Skeen and others are meeting every Monday night and many other times during the week with people struggling with the kind of addictions that are ruining their lives.

But there is so much more that can be and must be done right here in Denver and around the world.

We aren't asking you just to support our ideas of what can be done, but more importantly we are asking what is God laying on your heart that we can come alongside you.

That's why we call it "Compassion Unleashed."

I want you to watch what I think is a powerful present day outworking of the story of the Good Samaritan – a man with God's heart of compassion.

Video: "The Heart of Texas –

Luke 10:36-37 Jesus asked, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor 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."

Prayer

You must read at least the two following books:

Ron Sider, [Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger](#)

Craig Blomberg, [Neither Poverty nor Riches](#)

Other considerations:

The poor among us:

- At least one billion people out of the world's nearly 6 billion fall below the poverty line.
- Two million children die every year from easily preventable diseases.
- It is estimated that 1.3 billion people do not have safe drinking water.
- The wealth of the richest 387 people in the world is more than the combined incomes of 2.5 billion of the poorest people in the world.
- The infant mortality rate is higher in the US than in any other developed country but those infants deaths happen hugely disproportionately among blacks, Hispanics and native Americans.
- Americans spend more on cut flowers each year than they spend on overseas missions.
- We spend one and a half times as much on chewing gum, five times as much on pets, seventeen times as much on diet products, twenty-six times as much on soft drinks, and 140 times as much on legalized gambling.

Keith Suter put it this way, "In its most dramatic and obscene form, the question is whether the labor and resources of the Third World nations should contribute more to the opulence of America's cats and dogs than to the elementary good health of Third World humans."

(from Blomberg's Neither Poverty nor Riches, 18-19)

Purchasing power comparisons:

U.S. \$24,750/person

Canada \$20,850

India \$1,220

For Indians that means like trying to live in the US on \$440/month for a family of four.

(From Ron Sider's Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger (1999), 26)

I have many times emphasized the NT teaching that generosity is not marked by how much one gives, but by how much one has left after giving.

In 1993, the last stats I have access to, Denmark gave only 1.03% of its GNP to aid other nations.

The US gave .15% (that's less than a quarter of 1%)