

Prayers

To God

Read a psalm, such as psalm 145 (or any of the last 6 psalms), and let this be a start for your praises of God, whether silently, in tongues or in any other language.

For myself

Weekly theme: discipleship

Consider some of the discipleship issues raised in Luke 10:1-12, and pray that you will reflect Christ's commission in your life

For others

Lord God, You have made the whole world, and You understand it and control it. We, however, understand little, and as the world of science explores our planet, the less it seems that humanity accepts the splendour of Your power as Creator. Shake the world from its complacency, Lord God, and show us the glory of Your power; that we may surrender to You and Your awesome majesty, and find Your love as redeemer and Friend. AMEN

Meditation

The love of God delights us

Like the smile of a baby and the grasp of its hand.

The love of God surprises us

Like the joy of meeting a close friend, unexpectedly.

The love of God enlightens us

Like the brilliance of the sun which brings a daily dawn.

The love of God embraces us

Like the comfort of a lover whose passion is eternal.

The love of God encourages us

Like the words of a teacher, proud of our achievements.

The love of God strengthens us

Like the support of someone close, who cares for our needs.

The love of God empowers us

Like a meal of 'bread and wine' which feeds the soul.

Bible Passage

Luke 10:29-37

²⁹ But wanting to vindicate himself, the lawyer asked Him,

"And who is my neighbour?"

³⁰ Taking this up, Jesus replied,

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and stumbled into muggers, who stripped him, beat him up, and went away, leaving him half dead.

³¹ It just so happened that a priest was travelling down that same road; but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side.

³² Then in the same way a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he, too, passed by on the opposite side.

³³ But then, as he journeyed, a Samaritan came close to him; and when he saw the man, he was filled with compassion. ³⁴ He went over to him and after tending his wounds with olive oil and wine, he bandaged them. Then he lifted him onto his own donkey, brought him to an inn, where he was looked after.

³⁵ On the next day he took out two coins, gave them to the innkeeper, and said,

'Take care of this man; and I will repay you any extra expense when I return.'

³⁶ Now, which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who stumbled into muggers?"

³⁷ The lawyer said,

"The one who put his compassion into action for him."

Jesus said to him,

"Go and do the same."

Review

Thankfully, the early church quickly grasped Jesus' teaching that true religion was not a matter of rules and regulations, but of faith in Christ followed by deeds that put faith into action. James, the brother of Jesus, put it this way in his letter; *'be doers of the Word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves ...'* (James 1:22). Intriguingly, we wonder whether James was with Jesus and the seventy disciples when a lawyer challenged Him about what it meant to be a disciple, and live in obedience to God. Did he, after placing his faith in his brother Jesus, hear Him speak the parable of the 'Good Samaritan' and realise its enormous significance? Did this change his understanding of what God wanted of His disciples? It is certainly possible.

One thing is very clear, the parable of the Good Samaritan continues to have power to make us think very carefully about the practice of our faith and how we live in obedience to God to this day. Of course, the parable is set in ancient times, and we hardly know the characters of

the Priest, the Levite and the Samaritan. However, we cannot fail to realise Jesus' point, which is that God's command in Scripture to *'love your neighbour'* (Leviticus 19:18) means that we must respond immediately to human need, and cut through all cultural or religious blockages to do so. This is what Jesus means by saying to the lawyer after delivering the parable, *'go and do the same'* (10:37)

However, there is another message here which we should not forget. At the beginning, the lawyer asked Jesus the question, *'who is my neighbour?'* (10:29), and Jesus turns the question back on him in a subtle way. As we read the parable, we readily understand the essential point about being ready to be neighbourly to those in need, but at the end, He first asks the lawyer a different question, and the answer points us in a slightly different direction.

Jesus poses the question *'which one was a neighbour to the man who stumbled into muggers?'* (10:36), and the answer given by the lawyer is, *'the one who put his compassion into action for him.'* (10:37). This little exchange tells us that Jesus wanted the lawyer to recognise not merely that the Samaritan did what was right and should be copied, but that the Samaritan was 'a neighbour', indeed, his neighbour! Now this is a different point altogether, and quite different from the message about love in action. Jesus wanted the lawyer to recognise his own prejudice and potential bigotry. It is perhaps because the figure of the Samaritan holds no particular fear for us today that most do not spot this meaning of the parable.

In Jesus' day, Jews regarded the Samaritans as anathema. Samaritans had indeed come from Jewish stock, from the old northern Kingdom based in Samaria, the Israelite capitol of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 16:24f. 2 Chr 18:1f.). However, after the northern Kingdom had been overrun by Assyrians in 721BC (2 Kings 17:5f,24f.), it had been re-settled by various peoples who then intermarried with the remaining Jews. Such apostasy was 'beyond the pale' for orthodox Jews, for although the Samaritans worshipped God in their own ways, they were beyond salvation and the love of God.

Jesus' teaching would have shocked the Jews of the day on two levels. Firstly, His teaching about practical love ignored all ritual law. But the parable taught that God wanted His people to love non-Jews, people they regarded as outside of the will of God! They were to love their hated neighbours! What a challenge this presents now to us, who must do the same! We know we are called to love our brothers and sisters in the fellowship of believers (John 13:34f.), but the love of God does not stop there; it must be shown to all. This does not mean that non-Christians are saved by their deeds; it simply means that we must copy God, who loves unconditionally.

We must now return to the parable's initial clear message, which is about practical love. Jesus painted a well-known picture of people walking from Jerusalem in the heights of the Judean hills to the city of Jericho, a distance of seventeen miles and a drop of 3,000 feet to the Jordan plain. It was a well worn road, because Jericho was home to many of the Priests and Levites who worked in the Jerusalem Temple. Those walking this pathway were going home after a shift of work lasting several days! But while this may explain why the Priest and the Levite did not 'do the right thing', it is no excuse. The mugged man lay half dead on the road, and if dead, should not be touched because that would make a person impure and unable to work (Leviticus 21:1f.). But these two religious servants neither had a look or made arrangements for anyone else to help; they chose to preserve their religious integrity over showing true godliness!

The later actions of the Samaritan are impressive, and show the love that meets with God's approval. This man cared for the one who was mugged by giving him all assistance possible, first aid, transport, and provision (10:34). The money he gave the innkeeper would have paid for around three weeks boards and lodging in an inn of those days, by our best estimation (10:35 - see 'Going Deeper'). Some reckon that Jesus said this to indicate the supreme

generosity of God, but the parable certainly suggests we consider that generosity must go much further than we often think.

There are many ways to read this great parable of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit will always find ways of teaching us the deeper things of God through our careful reading of His Word. Nevertheless, the two great themes of this parable remain a powerful challenge to the faith of all believers. Firstly, to show the love of God to those who are outside of our own social and religious circles, for such people are our 'neighbours'. Secondly, to respond immediately to the need of our 'neighbours', whoever they are, with the love of God that always goes further and is more abundant than we can imagine.

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V30 *'Taking this up, Jesus replied'*

Other translations:

'In reply, Jesus said' (NIV)

'Jesus replied' (NRSV)

There appears to be little of interest in these few words. However, the Greek sentence contains three words, two of which translate as 'Jesus replied', but the first one 'hypolambown' means 'to take up'. Many translators leave the word out on the assumption that the words 'Jesus replied', cover the whole phrase adequately. However, I believe that it is wrong to do this because the additional word conveys the idea that Jesus strongly engaged with the question, hence my translation, *'Taking this up, Jesus replied'*. This is one occasion when Jesus answered a question directly, not by posing a problem or another question. The parable connects powerfully with the lawyer and his question, and also with everyone who read it.

V37 *'The one who put his compassion into action for him'*

Other translations:

'the one who had mercy on him' (NIV)

'the one who showed him mercy' (NRSV)

There is a subtle point here that could be missed, and it has affected my translation. The Greek could be translated *'the one who does mercy for him'* and the verb in the sentence emphasises that 'mercy' is not an attitude or a feeling, it is something done. Because there is a danger that we think of mercy as a stance of the mind, I have strengthened the idea that what Jesus commends in the Samaritan is the deeds he has done in showing mercy. He has put a godly principle into practice.

Further Comments

An amazing fact about the Parable of the Good Samaritan

This is only an aside, but in the ancient manuscripts of the Bible, many of the great sayings of Jesus or other major texts of the Bible show signs of editing or alteration. This is often

because as favourites, these stories were often handed down in different forms before the manuscripts we now have were written. To put it bluntly, scribes responsible for copying the Gospels sometimes appear to have inserted their own preferred versions of stories rather than copy the exact documents they had before them; either that, or their copies were corrected by others, later on. And remember, printing had not yet been invented, so everyone was dependent on the skill of copyists. It is therefore remarkable that the entire story of the parable of the Good Samaritan, found only in Luke and a clear favourite of Christians from the very beginning of the church, shows NO sign of alteration or amendment whatsoever. This is an amazing historic fact and one that suggests the story we have is powerful and probably very close to what Jesus actually said.

Why was Samaria regarded as a dangerous place by Jews?

The paragraphs below are identical to those found in our study of Luke 9:51-62. They are reproduced here because they assist us with this text.

At the time of David (1000BC), this central region of Israel had been occupied by the northern tribes, especially the tribe of Ephraim. It was overcome by the Assyrians around 700BC, and the Old Testament records that in order to punish its captives, the Assyrians took the Israelites out of this region into captivity, and replaced them by settlers from other parts of the Assyrian empire (2 Kings 17:24).

More than this, it was thought in those days that when people settled into an unfamiliar land, they should worship the gods who were there before them in order to gain their favour. So these foreign settlers began to copy the worship of God, and set up their own copy of the Temple in Samaria. To a true Jew, such a 'copy' of the things of God was abominable, and they did not regard Samaritans as the true people of God. The feelings were reciprocated!

This is all important for our understanding of the story of Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman (John 4), the parable of the 'Good Samaritan' (10:29f.), and the one leper out of ten who returned to thank Jesus (he was a Samaritan – 17:16)

Priests and Levites

We do not always understand what the Bible means by 'Priests' and 'Levites', but the Bible gives us all the necessary information to build up a picture.

Firstly, the Priests were the descendants of Aaron, and he was ordained priest by his brother Moses (Exodus 28:41, 29:9f.). In later years, a high priestly family, descendants of Aaron, became preeminent in the governance of the life of Israel (see the High Priest Zadok, in 1King 1:44f.), together with the King and his advisors and prophets, and later descendants of this family continued to be the priestly line of all Israel to the time of Christ.

Secondly, the Levites were, and are, Jews of the tribe of Levi, one of the sons of Jacob (Israel – Gen 29:34, 34:25f.). Moses and his brother Aaron were Levites, and when the people of Israel sinned against God in the desert (Exodus 32), it was the tribe of Levi who rallied to Moses' defence (Exodus 32:26f.), and were rewarded by being granted special status as those who served God in the tabernacle. Throughout Israelite history, their work was to service the worship of God amongst the Jewish people. They had no land or property within Israel, and consequently, they were often poor.

So whilst the priests who were descended from Aaron were also Levites, they had a high position in society and served pre-eminently in Jerusalem. Many of them were 'right wing' traditionalists, and were also Sadducees. Levites at the time of Christ were of a lesser importance in the service of worship in the Temple. Their roles were often those of teachers within Israel and they lived throughout the country, making a living as rabbis. More often than not, they were Pharisees.

Some details of the story

The Samaritan tended the mugged man's wounds with wine and oil (10:34). We may not do such things today, but they were as good as it could get in the first century. Wine would have acted as an antiseptic, and oil as an aid to healing would make a wound feel better. They were simple but effective remedies, but they needed the long term care of the inn-keeper (10:35).

It is difficult for us to gauge the money mentioned in this passage, of two denarii. It has been (according to Polybius - ii. 15.6) that in the first century, accommodation could be secured in Italy costing around one denarius for a month. Other evidence (researched by J Jeremias) suggests that food for a day cost 1/12 a denarius in Israel. If this is all true, denarii were valuable coins; they would buy board and lodging for around 3 weeks.

The idea that the Jews have failed

The parable of the Good Samaritan is often quoted as one of those that prophesies the failure of Judaism. The failure of the Levite and the Priest to do God's will is seen as pointing forward to the time when they would fail to understand the love of God in Christ, and have Him killed.

Certainly, this is one of the background themes of this part of Luke, but it should not perhaps be regarded as a major theme of the parable. Jesus seems to have wanted the lawyer to appreciate rather different points about his duty to love others.

Discipleship

Application

Passing by the needs of the world

Evil abounds where people of religion pass by the needs of the world. There are many who cry out in need now, and like the mugged man by the side of the road, and often, their plight is hidden. It is all too easy to walk on by and not look too hard at those around us; yet our Lord surely asks us to be open to the needs that are there. We are all touched by Jesus' challenge here, and we must learnt keep our eyes and our hearts open, so that the Holy Spirit can use our awareness to create possibilities for both mission and the service of others.

In the past, some within the church have been so taken by this message that they have put their all into doing good. It is as if the parable of the Good Samaritan delivers a moral teaching similar to philanthropy, as if the exercise of our faith must be like being an excellent boy scout or a girl guide. Let us make sure we study the parable carefully, because as we have discovered, its message is far more complex.

The challenge of today's 'Samaritans'

Some reckon that our passage today has a very anti-clerical flavour. The clerics within it, the Priest and the Levite, merely show us who is not a neighbour (see Jesus' challenge at the end; *'which one of these three ... was a neighbour?' – 10:36*). Our challenge therefore must be to consider who, today, is like a 'Samaritan' to us that we must face considering them our neighbours?

This is a tough question, for many Christians find it hard to relate to people such as this today, that is, those who have a different view of God, perhaps Jehovah's Witnesses or Muslims. But we learn the lesson of the Good Samaritan when we learn to accept from these and others not their faith or world view, but whatever God would teach us through them. For example, Jehovah's witnesses express their faith in ways that often put us to shame; their zeal shows no bounds, and we say to ourselves, 'so should ours!' In the same way, we can

look at the hard work done by good people in the Muslim community, and commend their effort on behalf of others, and we are not accepting their faith by so doing. There is no reason why good cannot be done in our communities by everyone who seeks the good of others. People of other faiths are our neighbours, and the Lord wants us to pursue what is good because ultimately, He is 'good'.

But God does not save people because they do good or preach their faith very well, and the parable of the Good Samaritan is not first and foremost about the nature of salvation. It warns us to reflect the love of God in all we do, to be generous hearted towards all people, and not turn aside from people who are in need. These things should be our goal because we are saved; but we are not saved by them.

Ideas for what to do

- Think back over the journeys you make each day, and consider whether you are indeed passing people who are in desperate need. Of course, much need is not visible, but rather, are some things more visible than we like to admit? How can you be a true neighbour to people in need around you?
- Pray for courage to deal with those people you find difficult, whether they are people of other faiths or beliefs, or those who you find difficult to approach for social reasons. Pray also the right words and deeds to show God's love in this world.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What do you believe is the key message of the parable of the 'Good Samaritan'?
2. Discuss the different characters in the story; who do they represent today? Does Jesus put Himself into this picture?
3. What does this parable teach us about the love of God?

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we have walked on by when others are in need. Please forgive us. Open our eyes to see what You see, open our hearts to the compassion You feel, and open our pockets to be as generous as You have been to us, in leading us to our salvation. **AMEN**
