

“ENTERING ANOTHER’S STORY”

Read Luke 10:25-37

A story is most meaningful when we enter it; when we identify with the setting, plot, dialogue, and predicaments of the characters. But when the story is another human life—fact, not fiction—are we willing to get involved?

“And Who is My Neighbor?”

To understand the Parable of the Good Samaritan, we must also understand why Jesus told it. Luke explains that a legal expert came to Jesus with an important question: **“Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** Not surprisingly, this lawyer’s approach to salvation was a legal one. “What must I do?” he asked. “Be nice? Keep the Ten Commandments? Watch my language?”

How did Jesus answer the lawyer? By directing him to the very law of God he professed to keep. And here the lawyer’s self-defense began to unravel. If saving himself meant keeping God’s law perfectly, and if God’s law said, **“Love your neighbor as yourself,”** then there had to be exceptions to the rule. Surely God did not expect him to love people like the hated tax collector or despised Samaritan. So, seeking to justify himself, the lawyer asked, **“And who is my neighbor?”** In response, Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

“God Doesn’t Do Coincidences”

Most of us are familiar with this parable of Jesus, so we are already thinking about the despicable actions of the priest and Levite, who **“passed by on the other side”** without helping the victim. We’re shaking our heads and vowing, “Well, if that had been me, I would have stopped.” But let’s not pass too hastily over the words in verse 31: **“A priest happened to be…”**



We may view encounters with people as “by chance.” But is there really room for chance or coincidence within the providence of God? Remember that passenger who sat next to you on the airplane? Remember that gaunt, unkempt man on the park bench—dressed in rags, shoulders slumped, head in hands? Remember that distraught coworker, the stranger who visited church, and the deathly pale patient lying in a hospital bed? Were these encounters “by chance,” or were they God-given opportunities to enter the story of another human being?

Of course, Jesus could have just as easily made the priest and Levite in the parable a farmer and shepherd; a well-digger and tax collector; a merchant and soldier. Instead, He purposely

made these two characters religious leaders. Need more be said? Interestingly, when Jesus told the lawyer in verse 28, **“You have answered correctly,”** the Greek word used was ORTHOS, from which we derive our English word ORTHODOXY.

Having the right confession is essential. But of what worth is the right confession without the right actions and right involvement? It’s always easier to pass by on the other side than to stop and get involved. It’s always easier to extend handshakes and say “please sign the guest register” than to visit people at home. It’s always easier to pretend we don’t notice when Christians stop coming to church, or to ignore the warning signs of a troubled marriage. Not my business. Not my responsibility. Someone else will be coming along to help soon enough. What if Jesus Christ had treated us that way?

“The Good Samaritan”

In this parable it is the despised Samaritan who proves to be the Scriptural example of **“love your neighbor as yourself.”** When he sees the victim lying in the road, he does not ask, “Are you friend or foe; Jew or Samaritan?” He does not pass by

on the other side under the pretext of “places to go” and “people to see.” Instead, he stops. He risks. He gets personally involved. He invests using his own clothes as bandages; his own wine and oil as disinfectant and balm; his own donkey to transport the victim; and his own money to pay for the victim’s recovery at a roadside inn. In other words, the Samaritan entered the story of a complete stranger.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho stretched 17 miles through the desolate Judean wilderness. But those 17 miles can also represent 17 horrible blocks of an inner city neighborhood; 17 floors of a rundown apartment building; 17 forgotten rooms in a nursing home; or the 17 years a devoted husband or wife cared for a spouse with Alzheimer’s. What makes us willing to walk those 17 miles, whatever they are? What fills us with such compassion that we are willing to enter the story of another human being? Surely it is the knowledge of the compassionate way in which Jesus Christ entered our lives—and saved us. The lawyer began by asking, “Who is my neighbor?” The Gospel of Jesus Christ asks, “Who can I be a neighbor to?”

Written by Pastor Mark Weis

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