

## Sunday School Notes for 14 July: The Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37)

The story of the Good Samaritan (which might be described as the story of the good enemy!) is probably one of the best known stories of the Bible – so well known that even non-Christians talk about it and there is even a caring group in society which calls themselves *The Samaritans*.

Here is the story that Jesus told.

*The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a long twisty downhill road through pretty bleak surroundings. It was known as the 'Road of Blood' in Jesus' day because there was so much blood shed there by robbers. And this is the story of one of the victims who had been beaten and robbed and left for dead in the sun. Three people came past: a priest, a Levite (one whose job was to help in the temple) and a despised Samaritan. (Samaritans were despised because they were not pure Jews but were a mixed race. They were the offspring of intermarriages between Jews and the people who took over Israel while the Jews were in exile in Babylon. They didn't observe all the Mosaic laws and didn't believe that the temple in Jerusalem must be the centre of worship.) The two Jewish men were leaving Jerusalem so one would suspect that they had just done duty in the temple there, demonstrating their obedience to God's laws. Yet these two did not show mercy to their neighbour. The Samaritan was the only one who helped the man. He showed incredible care and generosity: disinfecting and bandaging his wounds, putting the injured man on his donkey and paying for him to stay at the inn until he had recovered. Two denarii would have paid for a 2-month stay! The injured man would have been shocked to find that he was rescued by one of the despised people. In fact the Jews believed that it was sinful to accept mercy from a Samaritan.*

So what does this story teach us?

At a basic level it shows us how we ought to be merciful to others, even those we don't identify with or even really like.

To get to the heart of the story, however, we must consider the context.

There were always people in the crowd who were spying on Jesus. They didn't come to hear his messages from God. They just wanted to hear him say something which could be used in court to get rid of him and his troublesome ideas. On this particular day one of these lawyers was trying to lay a trap for Jesus. He pretended to be a humble listener, calling Jesus "Teacher", but he was trying to provoke Jesus into saying the wrong thing. He asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" In other words, "What must I do to please God so that I can go to God when I die?"

Jesus knows what the lawyer is up to and turns the question on him: "What does the Holy Book tell you to do?" The lawyer answers promptly that by the Jewish law there are two things God wants his servants to do:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength and with all your mind” (Deut 6:5) – a statement the Jews repeated often  
*and*  
“Love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev 19:18).

Jesus commends him on his correct answer and tells him that if he lives like that he will please God. How embarrassing to have a country preacher put a legal expert in his place! Perhaps in an attempt to cover up the fact that he had been beaten by Jesus, the lawyer asked “But who is this neighbour that I am supposed to love?”

Jesus doesn’t answer him directly. He tells the above story in a setting the listeners would all understand. This is how he points out two key things:

First, that it isn’t a matter of deciding who we should show mercy or compassion to (i.e. a definition of ‘who is my neighbour’), but rather it is a matter of how we should act all the time (we must *be* neighbours or givers of compassion to all people at all times). God’s people should be full of compassion – or they are breaking God’s Law. Any law which forbade giving and receiving compassion was far from God’s teaching.

However, Jesus knows we come short. We do not live like this all the time. We all want some selfish “me-time” more than God time. We are all guilty of not living up to God’s law and we shall never get it right – no matter how hard we try. Perhaps this story also reminds us how far short we fall in obeying God. We will mess up – and that is why we need a Saviour, Jesus. He died in our place to compensate for the fact that we cannot keep the law perfectly; he paid the penalty for our failures.

So, because we have been shown mercy through Christ, we should ask him to live in us so that we can show mercy to all humankind.

Just as the story made the people of those days think, so it should make us deeply concerned about how we obey God.