

"How do we practice what we preach?"

In our first lesson, we asked the question, 'Can I preach what you practice?' in which we looked at some examples from the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. And in our second lesson I would like for us to look at the example of the **Good Samaritan** and ask the question, 'How do we practice what we preach?'

A preacher had been talking to a children's Bible class about kindness. He paused and asked, "If I should see a man beating a donkey and stopped him, what virtue would I be showing?" A little voice responded with the unexpected answer, "Brotherly love." I guess the point of the story is that we all have different ideas about what is involved with brotherly love, and if we are to practice what the Bible preaches, brotherly love needs to be involved.

We are going to look at the parable of the **Good Samaritan** this afternoon as we find in **Luke 10** and we are going to try and learn a few lessons from the Samaritan. Now this parable is probably one of the most well known even among those who are not Christians. But sadly it is also one of many parables which have been totally misinterpreted.

Some believe that the traveller represents man, who has left the heavenly city (**Jerusalem**) for the worldly one. (**Jericho**) Others believe that the robbers in the parable are representative of the devil and sin, who leave man dying in sin. Some believe that the priest and the Levite refer to the Law and its sacrifices, which are unable to help, but the Good Samaritan is Jesus, who provides the help needed.

Still others believe that the wine represents the blood of Christ; the oil, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. And finally others believe the inn is the church, the innkeeper representative of the apostles; the two coins representing baptism and the Lord's Supper. Now these are all interesting interpretations of the parable, but we need to ask the questions.

Is that really what Jesus is teaching us in this parable? Or does Jesus have some other lesson that He wants us to learn from it? Let's start with a little background information. **Luke 10:25** "A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus." Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to receive eternal life?"

The "lawyer" we read about here would be a person who would know the Law of Moses very well. And when he came up to Jesus and tried to trap or test as some translations have it, it doesn't always mean in a negative way. It may simply mean that the lawyer was trying to find out just how faithful Jesus was to the Law of Moses.

But when we read the text carefully we also see that he may have been trying to trick Jesus. Because the text says, 'he stood up' maybe he was trying to draw attention to himself. And as we will see in a few moments the text tells us that he tried to "justify" himself with another question. Again this could imply that he was interested in more than just a simple answer to his question.

But when you think about his question, it sounds very similar to the question asked by the rich young ruler in **Luke 18:18** "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus answers that question by pointing him back to the Law. **Luke 10:26** "What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?"

And so, because Jesus answered the question with two other questions, He showed that He did have confidence in the Law. Now it's important that we keep all this in its context because we need to remember that at this time the Law was still in force. So, the lawyer replies with a proper understanding of what the Law taught concerning eternal life.

Luke 10:27+28 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind"; and 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' "You are right," Jesus replied; "do this and you will live." He basically quotes from **Deuteronomy 6:5** and **Leviticus 19:18**.

And remember upon these two laws, one to love God, the other to love your neighbour, the entire Law was based. But the lawyer is not finished, he goes on and says in **Luke 10:29** "But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?"

You see it's here he tries to "justify" himself, possibly because he was embarrassed about how easily Jesus answered him. But he asks the question which brought about the parable, "And who is my neighbour?"

So, that's the build up and background to the parable and it's now that Jesus answers the lawyer's question about **who is my neighbour?** Luke 10:30 "There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead".

A man travels from **Jerusalem** to **Jericho**, and is attacked, this was a distance of around **20 miles**. It was a well known and dangerous road, known as "**The Way of Blood**" because of the robbers. The poor guy was stripped of his clothing, wounded by robbers, and is basically left half dead.

Jesus continues and says in Luke 10:31+32 "It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came there, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by on the other side."

Jesus says that two people pass by and do nothing, the first was a **priest**, and the second was a **Levite**. Both of these men were of the religious elite in Israel at that time.

Jesus continues in Luke 10:33-35 "But a Samaritan who was travelling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Take care of him,' he told the innkeeper, 'and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him.'"

Jesus says a Samaritan comes by and shows compassion to the man who was beaten up. Now remember that the Samaritans were the descendants of those imported at the time of the Assyrian captivity according to **2 Kings 17:24-41**. But they were also a group of people who were despised by the Jews according to **John 4:9**.

Yet these so called religious people, the priest and the Levite did nothing. It was a Samaritan, the very people who would have been despised by the Jews; he was the one who showed compassion.

He was the one who was practicing what the priest and the Levite were preaching. He was the one who gave the man first aid, by placing bandages on his wounds, and applying oil and wine. He was the one who put the wounded man on his own animal and takes him to an inn. He was the one who gives the innkeeper two denarii which was around two days' wages to provide for his care. He was the one who tells the innkeeper to spend whatever it takes, and he will repay him when he comes again.

And so to answer our question as to '**How do we practice what we preach?**' We follow the example of the Samaritan. **James 1:22** "Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to his word; instead, put it into practice". You see loved ones there's a whole world of difference between knowing what to do and doing it. The Priest and the Levite both knew what to do but did nothing, the Samaritan knew what to do and did it.

And so Jesus asks the lawyer a question in **Luke 10:36** "In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbour toward the man attacked by the robbers?" And with a question which was so obvious the lawyer replies with the obvious answer in **Luke 10:37** "The one who showed mercy on him." And then Jesus tells the lawyer to do likewise.

You see even in the midst of an important question with an obvious answer, the Lawyer couldn't even bring himself to say the word Samaritan which again implies just how badly the Jews thought of the Samaritans.

But notice something else here; notice how Jesus turned the focus of the original question around. The first question was "**Who is my neighbour?**" and now Jesus adjusts the question by asking "**Who was the one that was a neighbour to the one in need?**" You see Jesus has a way of getting to the point; He has a way of really getting people to think deeper about what really counts. Let me put this parable in everyday language.

A certain woman went down from **Scotland** to **England** and ran over a spike which punctured her tire and left her stranded by the side of the road. After raising the bonnet of her car and tying a scarf to her radio antenna, she locked the door handles and sat in the car, praying for the Lord to send help. By chance, there came a limousine that way with a bumper sticker that read, "**Smile, God Loves You!**" When the occupants saw the stranded woman, they passed by in the far lane, without smiling.

And likewise, there came a sports car with a mobile phone and a bumper sticker saying, "Honk If You Love Jesus!" The man who was driving passed by in the far lane without honking and without using his phone to tell the motorway police about the woman's dilemma.

But a certain working man, as he travelled to his job, came to the spot where the woman was and, when he saw her raised bonnet, white scarf, and flat tire, he had compassion on her. He stopped his old beat-up banger, which had no bumper sticker and crossed the four-lane motorway, and offered to change the tire. The woman opened the door and gave him the key to the trunk. The man took out the spare tire, jacked up the car, removed the flat tire, and replaced it with the spare. When he had finished, the woman tried to pay him. He refused the money, saying, "If my wife were stranded on the motorway with a flat tire, I'd want some Good Samaritan to stop and help her out." He returned to his bumper-sticker-less banger, smiled, honked at her, and went his way. Which of these three was neighbour unto her who had a flat tire?

What Jesus was trying to do here was to focus the lawyer's attention to a more important truth and that was, what it means to "Love your neighbour as yourself." In other words, the whole purpose of the parable was simple, Jesus was teaching who our neighbours really are, and what it means to love your neighbour as yourself.

So, let's get back to our question, **how can we practice what we preach?** Well we practice what we preach by recognising that a neighbour is anyone we meet who has a need. And the world is full of people in need, **isn't it?** The world is full of people who need a cup of water in Jesus Name, **isn't it?** **Doesn't the church member who is struggling to pay the gas bill have a need? Doesn't the homeless person who sits in the city centre have a need?**

But, if my neighbour needed a cup of sugar, I would give it to him; **but what if he needed a friend?** If my neighbour needed bread, I would share with him; **but what if he needed love?** If my neighbour needed shoes, I would provide them for him; **but what if he needed compassion?** If my neighbour needed water, I would dig him a well; **but what if he needed God?**

Practicing what we preach means going the extra mile, it involved seeing what the real need is and providing that. Because loving your neighbour goes beyond seeing someone's **race**. Loving your neighbour goes beyond seeing someone's **nationality**. Loving your neighbour goes beyond seeing someone's **religion**. In fact, the Bible clearly teaches that loving your neighbour also means loving your enemy who may be in need in a neighbour.

You see that's the point Jesus was trying to make using the Samaritan as an example. We already saw that there was animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans. And although they saw each other as enemies, it was the Samaritan who helped the Jew in need.

Listen to what the writer of **Romans** says in **Romans 12:13** "Share your belongings with your needy fellow Christians, and open your homes to strangers." Now listen to what Paul says in **Galatians 6:10** "So then, as often as we have the chance, we should do good to everyone, and especially to those who belong to our family in the faith."

The early Christians were encouraged to practice what they preached. In fact, when you read through the church history you will see that one of the reasons the church grew so rapidly in the early years was because of their incredible hospitality to anyone who had a need. They opened their doors to strangers; they did good to anyone who had a need. So again, if we want to practice what the Bible preaches we need to recognise that anyone is our neighbour if we have the ability to help them. Because if we don't we end up being hypocrites just like the priest and the Levite.

You see in the parable out of the three passers-by, the first two should have been the first to help. The priest and the Levite should have been influenced by their religion to help. **Leviticus 19:33+34** and **Deuteronomy 10:17-19** tells us that they should have helped.

But they didn't help and so because they separated neighbourliness from their religion, they became hypocritical. We know that the priest would teach the Law, and the Levite would assist in the service. But failing to practice what they preached showed how shallow their devotion to their faith really was.

You see if we don't practice what we preach we end up being like a ventriloquist's dummy. **A young boy was sitting on the front row watching a ventriloquist perform with his dummy on his lap. Interacting with the boy, the dummy proceeded to ask the boy questions and talk with him.**

Thinking that the boy had found a new friend, he approached the dummy after the show to ask him to come over and play. The ventriloquist continued to decline the boy's requests until the boy became frustrated. Responding to the boy, the ventriloquist said, "Well, he doesn't DO anything, he just talks."

James 1:22 "Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to his word; instead, put it into practice." So, let me ask you, what kind of religion do we have? Does our religion show compassion on anyone in need? Does our religion go beyond social barriers? Does our religion take risks?

You know when you think about, the Samaritan took a great risk by stopping to help. What if the robbers were still near by? What if other thieves came by on this road known as "The Way of Blood"? He took a risk, and sometimes we need to do the same. Luke 6:30 "Give to everyone who asks you for something, and when someone takes what is yours, do not ask for it back." Christians are called upon to take risks when helping others. Now I'm sure we've all met people who have come to us and told us they have a need. And sometimes those same people keep coming back for more help, especially if it's financial help.

I remember one time this man came into a congregation and asked for money to buy some food, so we gave him some money for food. Three weeks later he came back again asking for more money to buy food, this time we offered to take him to Asda and buy him his food, needless to say he didn't want us to do that, he just wanted the money.

So how do we know people won't take advantage of our generosity? Well that's the risk isn't it? And maybe this is an area where we need to have faith in God. You see practicing what we preach also involves sacrifice. Imagine walking to work and you see this elderly lady lying on the street after falling over. What do you do? Do you go over and help her or do you think to yourself I need to get to work on time? I'm sure most people would stop and help even though it meant being late for work.

My point is that sometimes we need to be willing to put our schedules to the side to help others. The Samaritan was on a journey, but he still took the time to stop and care for the man. Practicing what we preach means we need to sacrifice the time to show compassion, even if we're forced to show compassion.

Matthew 5:41 "If one of the occupation troops forces you to carry his pack one mile, carry it two miles". You see loved ones the first mile may well be forced but the second mile is given out of love. And notice also that the Samaritan sacrificed more than just time and energy; he also sacrificed some of his own provisions.

Luke 10:34 "He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him". His sacrifice went the first mile when he stopped and helped the man out of what he possessed. His sacrifice went the second mile when he offered the innkeeper a blank cheque to provide for his help until he got back. Luke 10:35 "The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Take care of him,' he told the innkeeper, 'and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him.'"

I think this is one area where we fall short sometimes, we care for people and try to meet their needs and then we forget about them. I believe that we should take the time to go back to them every now and then just to make sure they are still OK.

Because do you know what will happen if we don't? Do you know what will happen if you don't stop to help anyone we have the ability to help? Do you know what will happen if we don't follow the example of the Samaritan? Do you know what will happen if we don't practice what we preach? Nothing, nothing happens but a whole list of wasted doors which God has opened up for us to reach someone with the gospel.

If God was open up a diary of our lives, I wonder how many wasted opportunities we've missed being a neighbour to someone because we've been too busy to help someone in need? I wonder how many wasted opportunities we've missed to be a neighbour to someone because we didn't go the extra mile to help someone?

I think James puts it across better than I can in James 2:15+16 "Suppose there are brothers or sisters who need clothes and don't have enough to eat. What good is there in your saying to them, "God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!"--if you don't give them the necessities of life?"

You see loved ones Christians need to do more than just talking. Jesus warns us in **Matthew 5:20** "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

What is our righteousness like? Is it like the righteousness of the priest and Levite, or of the Samaritan? Jesus says "Go and do likewise Christian," the question is, are we willing to practice what Jesus preached? You see loved ones there's no point and sitting here every time we hear a sermon and saying 'amen' if we're not willing to show the world that we're not just Christians in word, we need to show the world that we're real Christians with our words and deeds.

We need to show the world that we really do practice what we preach. Because let me tell you loved ones, I believe that I can preach a thousand sermons and people will forget within a day or two what I preached. But if I help someone in Jesus Name, you can be sure that, that one small deed done out of love and compassion will be remembered for a lifetime.