

BaptistWay Bible Series for Dec. 25: For the Christian, ‘neighbor’ is a broad term

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For the Christian, ‘neighbor’ is a broad term

- Luke 10:25-37

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Who is your neighbor? Who is sitting next to you right now? Who lives next door to you? As you think about these questions let us continue to discuss how we can be obedient disciples of and for Jesus.

Our lesson begins with an expert in the law standing to ask Jesus a question. This would suggest Jesus was teaching, and the others were sitting around listening. The expert in the law asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life.

Jesus, as usual, asked the man a question in return. Jesus knew the man was an expert in the law, so he asked the man to interpret it. Of course, the man knew what the law said about loving the Lord our God with all our hearts and with all our souls and all our strength and with all our minds.

And he knew the law teaches us to our love our neighbors as we love ourselves. After the expert in the law responded, as if to try to prove Jesus wrong, he asked who was his neighbor.



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Jesus continued his teaching to the expert in the law and to the crowd that was listening. He shared the story of the Good Samaritan. As we take a look at this story, let's look at the cultural aspects of the characters.

First of all, the man going from Jerusalem to Jericho who was left for dead was probably Jewish. No stress is put on his nationality because it is not important; his need for help is.

The first man who walks down the road is a priest. We all should expect the priest to quickly come to his aid, but are surprised when he does not. During this time period, it was written in the law that if you came in contact with a dead person or blood you would become unclean or impure.

If the priest were to become unclean, he would not be allowed to serve in the temple. Further, he would be required to go through ceremonial rituals to regain his purity. Those rituals took time. The priest was not willing to take the time to help this man in need because he was following the law of staying pure. So, to stay pure, he crossed to the other side of the road and continued on his way.

Next came a Levite, another religious leader. He was curious and walked past the injured man, but just like the priest, he did not help. The Levite

probably chose not to help for the same reason—he did not want to become impure.

Last, we see a Samaritan pass by the man. This would not have been the character the expert in the law or the crowd listening to Jesus would have expected next. There was a deep hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans.

The Jews saw themselves as pure, direct descendents of Abraham, whereas Samaritans were Jews who intermarried after the exile to other people within the kingdom. The Samaritans were considered impure. The Samaritans shared many traditions with the Jews, but did not use exactly the same Scriptures nor worship in the same place or way as the Jews. The Samaritans likewise disdained the Jews.

This Samaritan not only stopped to help the man dying alongside the road, he went out of his way to care. The Samaritan cleansed and bandaged the wounds, thus preventing further complication of infection or pain. He then placed the man on his donkey. Now the Samaritan had to walk to Jericho. He came to an inn and paid two denari—enough for a two month stay—for the injured man’s care. He also promised the inn keeper to reimburse him for any addition costs.

After Jesus finished sharing the parable, he asked the expert in the law which was a neighbor in the story. Not willing to even say the word “Samaritan,” the expert in the law replied, “the one who showed mercy on him.”

Throughout the whole discussion with Jesus, the expert of the law never got it. He knew the law and knew he needed to love his neighbor, but he believed his neighbor was whoever he felt like helping.

As we look at this story and reflect on who is our neighbor, we must remember Christ showed love to all people. Christ calls us to show love and

mercy to those around us whether they are black, white, brown, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, atheist—or whatever. Followers of Jesus who are obedient and genuine reach out in generous, unselfish, impartial loving concern to all others in need.

Romans 3:23 reminds us “all have sinned.” That means all of us need God’s mercy. In Matthew 5:7, Jesus taught that God is happy with the merciful. He has shared his mercy with us in abundance. How can we, as his disciples, fail to share care and mercy with those around us? You see, as Jesus teaches us in the parable today, the question is not “Who is my neighbor?” Instead, we must ask ourselves “Whose neighbor am I?”

Discussion questions

- Which character in the parable do you most represent? Why?
- What keeps us from helping those in need around us?
- Who is the person in need you find it hardest to help? Why?

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