

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Broadcast Date: 1 August 2010

No. T0636

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A Place to Stay: A place of Compassion - Luke 10:34

In the middle of the nineteenth century, one of the most well-known and best-read books in the world must have been 'The Tale of Two Cities', by Charles Dickens. Today we are going to think about 'A Tale of Two Cities'; not, on this occasion, London and Paris, but Jerusalem and Jericho.

It is an interesting fact that if you leave Jerusalem in any direction, necessarily you go down. The city itself is relatively elevated at just over 2,700 feet (about 900 metres) above sea level. In particular, if from Jerusalem you take the road east to Jericho, you rapidly descend from that elevated height, and in a tortuous journey of about 15 miles (24 km) you descend about 3,500 ft (1,150 metres), because the city of Jericho, or what's left of it, lies a little more than 800 ft (about 250 metres) below sea level. It is also deeply significant that the Bible states quite clearly that, long term, Jerusalem is God's appointed centre on earth, from which untold blessing will eventually be distributed to 'the uttermost part of the earth'. Jericho on the other hand, warrants the infamy of being the 'city of the curse', because of the ungodliness and opposition to Israel of their citizens which resulted in its destruction in the days of Joshua. It is clearly significant that if you choose to depart from the place of blessing (Jerusalem) you must inevitably go down, and eventually finish up at the place of the curse (Jericho). The fundamental lesson from this is that if we turn away from the blessing that God in His mercy freely offers us, the only alternative is to be subjected to the righteous judgment of a Holy God.

Our portion today from Luke 10 gives us one of those delightful little parables in which the actual details of what happened are a very vivid illustration of important moral and spiritual truths. Let us work our way through it, from verses 25 to 37.

- Verses 25-29 give us a verbal interchange between the Lord Jesus and a religious lawyer.
- Verses 30-35 provide a graphic account of the parable the Lord Jesus told the man.
- Verses 36-37 bring the resulting challenge, first of all to the lawyer, and through him, then to us Christians in our day.

In verse 25, we are introduced to 'a certain lawyer', an expert in the application of the Jewish moral and ceremonial law, that is, The Law of Moses. The text says 'he stood up', undoubtedly high in his own estimation of himself. The way he stood was a commentary on how he felt about himself, as we might say feeling 'ten feet tall' in his own estimation of himself.

Next, we read that he was tempting Jesus. Who did he think he was, putting Jesus, the Son of God, to the test? His first question gives the game away. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" – He wanted to deserve eternal life by doing something that would be worthy of commendation. He is not alone in that. In John 6:28-29 we read that there were those who came to the Lord Jesus and said, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said unto them, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Not many works, but one work, and that a work of faith, belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as detailed in Romans 10:9-10: 'if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.' This man desired to receive eternal life as if it was something he deserved! Something he was due to inherit! Something to which he had a legitimate claim! Eternal life is not to be earned. It is the gift of God. The best The Law could ever bring is the continuation of natural life in this world. Verse 28 of our chapter says, 'This do, and thou shalt live.' Not a happy prospect! Think of it! If you or I could keep every jot and tittle of the Law of Moses, the best we could ever hope for would be perpetual existence on earth, in this sordid, sinful world. What a terrible prospect! In practice, any doing by us results in death. This is because we are sinful in nature and by practice. As Romans 6:23 says, "the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"

In verses 26 and 27, the questioner finds that he is searched by his own question. The Lord Jesus turns his question round so that he is made to feel the sharp edge of the challenge. "What is written? How readest thou?" How do you interpret it? What do you think it means? The lawyer's answer was word perfect. "Give what is due, first of all to God, and then, what is due to your fellow men." The trouble is, only once in the history of the world has a perfect life been lived on earth in the sight of God in heaven. That was in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself during His life on

earth. That was the only period when the full implications of the Law have been fulfilled. That is, only when Christ lived on earth was there a man living on earth in a way that gave full satisfaction and delight to God. This was clearly prophesied in advance, as for instance the prophet Isaiah foretold in 42:21 of his prophecy. "The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable." The record of that life, and the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ is given in the Four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

After this summary of the way in which the Lord Jesus glorified God in every aspect of His life on earth, the lawyer was constrained to give a very telling and significant addendum, "and thy neighbour as thyself." How right he was! This tells us that the personal faith of those who know God is intended to be the springboard for the way we act towards our fellow men. That is exactly what transpired when the Christian church was inaugurated on the day of Pentecost. The fulfilment of what the Lord called here the second commandment was truly seen in the early years of the Christian church.

Putting all this together, we see in the four Gospels the fulfilment of the Law in the personal life of Christ on earth. Then, in the Book of Acts we see how the features of that life were continued in the lives of Christians in their daily lives on earth. Their Lord and Master had gone back to heaven at the Ascension. The continuation of the features of that life were seen, and were intended to be seen, in the lives of those that are Christ's. The corollary to that is this. In our day, our lives are, and are intended to be, an exhibition of things that were demonstrated fully to the world in the life of Christ, personally, and then continued in measure after his departure in the lives of the early Christians. They are intended to be exhibited in the lives of you and me, if we say we are saved by the precious blood of Christ and on our way to heaven. A mighty challenge indeed! We must accept the clear teaching of scripture that our eternal salvation is entirely a matter of grace and faith, and not based at all or in any way on anything that we can do. Nevertheless it is the will of God, and our own practical responsibility, that, having been saved, we should live in such a way as to meet our responsibilities both to God and to our fellow men.

Verse 29 tells us that the lawyer was 'willing to justify himself'. That is absolutely impossible – 'it is God that justifieth' as we are told in Romans 8:33.

He raised another question. "Who is my neighbour?" The answer is clear. He that is in need! If I spot anyone who is clearly in need, it is up to me to act in a neighbourly way towards him, by helping him in whatever way I can.

In verse 30, we are told that the traveller fell among thieves, a picture of those who would rob you of the blessing God desires you to enjoy. He was stripped, robbed, severely wounded, and left half dead. Sadly, mugging is nothing new.

Verses 31-32 tell us that there were two men who fairly quickly came on the scene, but, oh! dear! what a response! A Priest happened to come by. He saw, and passed by on the other side of the road. Likewise, a Levite came, looked, and passed by on the other side. Now, these two were officers of the Law – the Mosaic Law. They were equipped and very willing to tell others what to do. It says that they passed by chance – it was never their intention to be involved. In a subtle way, this reminds us that neither The Law nor those who administer it can enable anyone to keep it.

However, when we come to verse 33 we come to a tremendous change. A change of heart, and, because of that, a resulting change of action! It is introduced by a little word, the little word 'but'. BUT – it is one of the big buts of scripture. 'But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.' Here we have the heart of the matter. Circumstantially, it was merely a place by the roadside. Morally, it was a place of immense compassion. The Samaritan was so different to the priest and the Levite. He was on a journey. He was travelling that way by intent. There was a definite purpose in his going that way. This was not said of the priest and the Levite. They just happened to be passing by. Then, he 'came where he was' again, by intent. He was minded to help. Finally, 'he had compassion on him'. He entered feelingly into the circumstances and desperate condition of the poor man.

What a beautiful picture this is of the Lord Jesus Christ. He left heaven's highest glory and came down into this world of sin and woe in order to take that specific journey which ended in His going to the cross of Calvary. In total compassion, He, the Sinless One, came right down to where we were in all our sin and misery. His compassion brought Him down for the express purpose of saving us from the judgment we so righteously deserve. It was no mere chance that He happened to be coming that way. He saw us in all our hopeless condition. His love led Him to come down to where we were in order to bring the love and kindness of God into a world that had been marred and ruined by sin. Then, in virtue of his sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, He is able and willing to supply everything that is needed to remedy our lost condition.

The fact that he was a Samaritan should have spoken to the lawyer's conscience. The Jews despised the Samaritans. They were infiltrators, unwelcome immigrants into Israel's Land of Promise. Remember the words of the Jews to the Lord Jesus in John 8:48, "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?" This was intentionally insulting

and abusive language. Racial discrimination, indeed! In long-suffering grace, the Lord Jesus accepted the taunts and rejection of the Jews who should have acclaimed Him as their long-promised Messiah. It was all part of that journey that He took to bring the grace of God to us.

Luke uses the word 'compassion' three times in his Gospel. Here, in chapter 10, it tells us how deeply moved the Samaritan was by the hopeless, pitiful condition of the poor traveller. A beautiful picture of the love of the Lord Jesus for us, you and me! In chapter 7, we read that when He saw the sorrow of the widow of Nain about to bury her only son, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, "Weep not." His heart entered fully into her deep sorrow. Then He ended her sorrow by resurrecting her son. In Luke 15, in the parable of the prodigal son, this word is used again to describe the father's feelings when he first saw his returning, wayward son in the distance. Verse 20 of that chapter says, "But when he was a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Notwithstanding all that the son had done, the father's heart was moved by the filthy condition into which his son had descended. The father could not wait for the son to get to the house. He ran out to meet him. Before the son had time to utter any word of repentance, the father was embracing him! True compassion indeed.

Verse 34 continues to outline the compassionate care of the Good Samaritan, "And He went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on His own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him." The Samaritan had with him everything that the poor man needed. Having experienced the painful treatment of the thieves, how that man must have appreciated the tender care of the Samaritan and the healing and soothing power of the oil and the wine for the wounds that he had received. 'He poured in oil and wine.' I have a very good friend who applies that in a very simple way. "Wine for the inside, oil for the outside." Well! That's alright, but I prefer to regard what the Samaritan carried as a simple but very effective first-aid kit. Wine to cleanse, a ready-made antiseptic, and oil to heal. Another picture of the comprehensive care the Saviour provides for His own.

The Samaritan picked up the poor man and put him on his own beast. We are not told how far it was to the inn. We do know that the Samaritan took him all the way to a safe haven. Having taken the man to an inn, he provided, at his own expense, for proper care for him until he planned to return for him. How right the old saying about the Lord Jesus, "He is an 'all the way home' Saviour". As Peter says, 'He careth for you'.

I once heard the different attitudes demonstrated towards the poor traveller by the various parties put very quaintly like this. The robbers said, in effect, "What's yours is ours and we're determined to have it". The Priest and Levite, by their action said, "What's ours is ours, we're determined to keep it, and you can't have it". The Samaritan, in total contrast, displayed the attitude, "What's mine is yours, and you can willingly have it." What motivated the Samaritan? Mercy, grace and compassion!

Overall, then, and primarily, we have a picture of the Lord Jesus. He came into this poor world, to rescue us from harm and danger, and from those who would rob us of the blessing of God. He has made arrangements for us to be cared for until He comes again, to take His own home, to be with Him and like Him for evermore. At the judgment seat of Christ, He will reward those who have been serving Him in His absence by caring, looking after, those who have been rescued from the clutches of the world and the devil.

However, the last touch is by no means an anticlimax. "Go, and do thou likewise!" What does that teach us? I will tell you what it teaches me! Christianity is essentially practical. Let us never forget that. If we really appreciate what the Lord Jesus has done for us, we will be glad to help, however and wherever possible, those we meet day by day who are in evident need. And then, not merely mechanically, but with real, true compassion. May this be our constant prayer!

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