

BE LIKE THE GOOD SAMARITAN

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Lesson: Luke 10: 25-37

The Lord had been challenged to produce an answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” The lawyer who asked Him that question did not really think that the Lord would be able to answer him; he thought that he would embarrass the Lord by asking this awkward question. He did not know who the Lord was, so he did not expect to learn anything new or important from Him. He thought that it was impossible to know who the neighbor is that we are supposed to help and love.

Now the first time we begin to know what the word neighbor means, we think that it refers to the people who live next door to us. They are the neighbors whom we are to love by helping them. That, of course, is very true; we *should* live in harmony with the people next door; we *should* be helpful to them and consider what they need; we *should* be friendly and courteous to them and do good to them. That is very true. But, as we shall see in a moment, there is a little more to it than that. There are *other* people besides the family next door who are our neighbors.

The Jewish people at the time when the Lord was on earth and before that time had a very limited idea of who their neighbor was. They thought that they were required to love or help only Jewish people. They thought they could ignore and forget about the people outside of their race, who were not Jews. The Lord knew this, and He knew that this was what the lawyer was thinking. And in order to show this man how mistaken and cruel his thinking was, He answered the man’s question by means of a special kind of story.

He said to him, “Which of these three (the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan) do you think was neighbor to the man who fell among thieves?” The answer was obvious. The man could do nothing but admit that the one who showed mercy on him, who was kind and helpful, was the neighbor, the one to be loved. So the Lord concluded by telling the man who had questioned Him to go and do as the Good Samaritan had done.

I wonder if you realize what a great shock it must have been to all the people who heard the Lord’s parable when they heard Him make a Samaritan—a man from Samaria—as much the neighbor as one of their own people. You see, the Jews were very nasty to the Samaritans. They despised them. They treated them with a cruel contempt. They took no notice of them. For them, the Samaritans simply did not exist.

You can see, then, how surprised they must have been when they heard the Lord's parable. The lesson in that earthly story was that even a Samaritan was to be treated as a neighbor—if he was kind, merciful, and helpful, and if he did what was good. The Lord *widened* their idea of who the neighbor was. By means of the story of the Good Samaritan He taught them that they were not to be neighborly only to their own people. Any one at all, no matter from what country or race of people, was their neighbor—if he did the good thing. This was to apply even to the Samaritans, whom they had formerly despised.

The Lord told that earthly story a long, long time ago. But its heavenly meaning, its lesson, will last for ever; because we all need to be reminded *often* that the neighbor we are to love or help is any person at all who is doing the right thing; not just those in our own family, or the people next door, or the people on our street or in our part of town, or our friends and the people we know, but anyone at all who does justly, loves mercy, and walks humbly with his God—anyone who is trying to practice his religion and do what is good. Any one doing that is like the Good Samaritan. Any group of people who show mercy and do what is good are the neighbor whom we should help, because helping is the sincerest way to love. Our country is like the Good Samaritan if it does what is good from mercy. But above all the Church is the neighbor that is to be loved—because it does the kind of good that lasts forever.

In brief then: the question was, "Who is my neighbor?" And the answer was, "He who showed mercy on him." *Amen.*