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Parables for Christian Living  
Seeing ourselves as Jesus sees us

**LIVING "NEIGHBORLY"**  
**Whose Neighbor**  
**Am I?**

**Luke 10:25-37**

**Parables from Luke**

Douglas Beyer

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Questions come in all sizes. Some are pint-size questions like “Where do you live?” and some are gallon-size questions like “What will you do for a living?” and others are barrel-size questions like “What are you living for?” Great minds don’t have fewer questions, just bigger questions. One of the biggest questions ever to challenge the human mind was posed to Jesus by a professional questioner. Here is Luke’s account of it:

A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to receive eternal life?”

Jesus answered him, “What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?”

The man answered, “‘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 neighbor as yourself.’”

“You are right,” Jesus replied; “do this and you will live.” But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?”

Jesus answered, “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. 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. But a Samaritan who was traveling 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.’”

And Jesus concluded, “In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbor toward the man attacked by the robbers?”

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The teacher of the Law answered, "The one who was kind to him."  
Jesus replied, "You go, then, and do the same."

**There are four parts to this episode.**

**A Personal Query: "What must I do to receive eternal life?"**

The teacher was not content merely to be alive, but wanted to have life eternal. He knew life was meant to be more than Monday-Tuesday – Wednesday – Thursday – Friday – Saturday – Sunday – Monday – Tuesday..... He asked "**What must I do to receive eternal life?**" Is that a question that people ask everyday?

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*Eternal* life refers to more than simple duration of time. It is a quality of living like that which we will enjoy in the age to come. Translated literally from the original Greek, it would be "life of [the] age." The ancient Hebrews conceived of all history as divided between this age and the age to come (**Matthew 12:32; Ephesians 1:21; Luke 18:28-30**).

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It was their hope to enjoy here and now in this age some of the quality of life which they would have in fullness in the age to come (**John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 17:3**).

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Eternal life was not something they had to die to get; they could receive it now. But the question was, and is, how? What did they have to do, and do we have to do, to receive eternal life?

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Do you know the plan of Salvation?

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**A Powerful Command: "Love the Lord..and your neighbor."**

Jesus made the teacher answer his own question. "What do the Scriptures say?"

The teacher knew the right answers, but it is not enough merely to get facts straight. "Do this," Jesus said, "and you will live." Merely knowing *how* to love is insufficient. You must love.

The inquiring teacher had missed heaven by about eighteen inches. Everything was in his head, instead of his heart. **Loving the Lord and neighbor was theory**, but not practice. He never gave that love away.

**A Petty Quibble: "Who is my neighbor?"**

"Who is my neighbor?" **theoretical discussion chokes practical action.**

**Why do we complicate what God has made simplistic?**

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Rather than argue the point, Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan. Parables are stories that start out being about someone else and end up being about the one to whom they are told. They are pictures that keep turning into mirrors.

In this parable Jesus illustrated four different attitudes. **First, there is the attitude of the thieves:** "What's yours is mine if I can get it." In Yiddish idiom there are two words which are wonderfully expressive of this kind of person. A "schlemiel" is a person who by nature always spills things on other people. And a "schlemozzle" is someone who always gets spilled on. The thieves in this parable are schlemiels who would turn the whole world into schlemozzles.

Under duress, don't we all have a little touch of schlemiel inside? "Every man for himself"....

**The second attitude is pictured by the priest and the Levite:** "What's mine is mine if I can keep it." On their wrists were phylacteries (**Deuteronomy 6:4-8; Matthew 23:5**), tiny boxes containing the very same Scripture that the teacher of the Law had just quoted. One would certainly expect them to help this poor victim of robbery.

Life's road always has two sides. On the "other side" you will get to Jericho in a hurry; on the victim's side you get into trouble in a hurry. On the "other side" are pavement and promises; on the victim's side are potholes and problems. On the "other side" is success; on the victim's side is sacrifice. On the "other side" you insist on your rights; on the victim's side you accept your responsibilities. On the "other side" you embrace someone who succeeds; on the victim's side you embrace someone who fails. On the "other side" you count the offering; on the victim's side you count the cost. On the "other side"

you can make a good living; on the victim's side you can make a good life. On which side of the road do you live and work?

**The third attitude pictured in this parable is the innkeeper's: "What's mine is yours if you can afford it."** This is where most of us spend most of our time. We are keenly aware of personal rights and property rights. Our attention is so fixed on what is right that sometimes we miss what is good.

The affluent say, "What is mine is yours if you can afford it." But what they rarely consider is this question: Can I afford to keep it? A wise man once said, "I ask you, God...let me be neither rich nor poor. So give me only as much food as I need. If I have more, I might say that I do not need you. But if I am poor, I might steal and bring disgrace on my God" (**Proverbs 30:7-9**). There is risk in affluence as well as risk in poverty.

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**The fourth attitude pictures in this parable is the Samaritan's: "What's mine is yours if you need it."**

Despite that prejudice, or because of it, Jesus makes a Samaritan the hero of this story. It is true that the Samaritan did not have the benefit of orthodox doctrine; but he didn't need to know much to be kind, nor do you!

"When he saw him, his heart was filled with pity." There was no quibbling about who was his neighbor, no haggling over risks and

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rights and responsibilities. Instead, he “went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them.” He provided the best medical care available at that time, using for bandages probably the rags torn from the Samaritans own clothing. “Then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn.” He walked while his wounded friend rode. He paid the innkeeper for the man’s care and promised to pay upon his return whatever additional expense the wounded man might incur.

What prejudices do I need to overcome to be a good Samaritan.

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**A Penetrating Question: “Who was neighbor to him?”**

Jesus concludes the story by asking the teacher of the Law, “In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbor toward the man attacked by the robbers?” That is the proper question. We will never “go and do the same” if we persist in asking “Who is my neighbor?” Rather we should ask, “Whose neighbor am I?” i.e., “Who is at *my* door, expecting help from *me* and looking upon *me* as his or her neighbor?”

Remember that the one who told this parable is himself the good Samaritan. He stands outside your social and ideological systems and tries to be your neighbor. He wants to pour his oil and wine upon the wounds of your soul, pay all your expenses from earth to heaven, and introduce you to a neighborhood as big as the world. He offers you life eternal and abundant. He says, “What’s mine is yours if you need it.” With that kind of rich resource, we are able to say the same thing

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to the victims of this world. We can never run out, for we are supplied by the unlimited grace of Jesus (**Philippians 4:19**).

“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”