

Loving Your Neighbour in Evangelism and Missions

When Hudson Taylor was director of the China Inland Mission, he often interviewed candidates for the mission field. On one occasion, he met with a group of applicants to determine their motivations for service. "And why do you wish to go as a foreign missionary?" he asked one.

"I want to go because Christ has commanded us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," was the reply.

Another said, "I want to go because millions are perishing without Christ." Others gave different answers. Then Hudson Taylor said, "All of these motives, however good, will fail you in times of testings, trials, tribulations, and possible death. There is but one motive that will sustain you in trial and testing; namely, the love of Christ".

We are considering evangelism and missions, and looking at how love is the real motive behind evangelism and missions. It is the love of Christ that compels us. And we are considering three loves that are behind evangelism and missions – love for God, love for neighbour, and love for church. Last week we saw how loving God – His fame, His will and His sacrifice, can motivate us to evangelism. Today we consider the second love of those three – love for neighbour. And for that, we look at the passage which deals very specifically with what that means – Luke 10:25-37.

Luke 10:25-37 25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" 27 So he answered and said, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.' " 28 And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." 29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 "Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 "Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. 33 "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 "So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 "On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' 36 "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" 37 And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Jesus here is facing an opponent. A lawyer comes to Jesus and wants to trip him up. He is not asking Jesus for information or knowledge, he is asking what he already knows to try to see if Jesus will slip up. So he begins by asking Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life.

How does Jesus answer? He answers his question with a question. What does the Bible say? How have you understood it?

The scribe answers by summarizing the Law – Love God wholeheartedly, and love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus says – that's correct, if you do this, you'll live.

Which is exactly right. The person who, from the first day of his life here on earth till the day of his death perfectly loves God and perfectly loves his neighbour has eternal life. You can't

be saved by works, but if you ever met a person who had perfectly kept the first and second commandments, such a person would not need to be saved or born again! Such a person is holy. But how many people do you know who are like that? Only one person ever walked this earth and perfectly loved God and loved His neighbour as Himself – Jesus Christ.

However, this lawyer thought he was one of those people. Verse 29 gives us a commentary on his motives: He, wanting to justify himself, asked, who is my neighbour? This lawyer thinks that he loves God perfectly. He loves a lot of people in his life, probably his family, his associates, his fellow lawyers and religious leaders. But he knows that he does not love all men like that. He knows he treats some men with contempt, with neglect, with indifference. So in order to justify himself, he wants to make sure that “love your neighbour” refers to the people he already loves. He wants to make sure that the people he does not love safely fall outside the category of neighbour.

The parable Jesus tells is a parable to answer that question. Jesus is going to explain through a story, who does not qualify as this lawyer's neighbour, and whom he can therefore not love. Through it, Jesus is going to teach two things: How to identify your neighbour, and how to treat your neighbour. As He does that, we'll see a number of applications for missions and evangelism.

I. How to Identify Your Neighbour

30 Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 "Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 "Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. 33 "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.

In our Lord's parable, there is certain man, an unnamed, average man. He goes from Jerusalem to Jericho. Now this already tells us who this man is. He is a Jew. He is travelling a well-known route from one Jewish city to another.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was not an easy road to be on. It was rocky and rugged, and a distance of around 30 kilometres. It is a very steep downhill slope, dropping about 1300 metres in that 30 kilometres. About halfway is a large boulder which was a very convenient place for thieves to hide. Not only so, but there are many places for thieves to hide, attack travellers, particularly travellers on their own, and get away. The amount of attacks on this road earned it the title “The Way of Blood”. So when Jesus mentions this, everyone knew he was talking about a dangerous spot.

Some thieves attack him. Apparently, he was a poor man. He did not seem to have possessions or money, and the thieves seemed to take out their frustration on him, violently assaulting him, brutally hitting him, and perhaps stabbing him, to where he was left for dead. He did not have the strength to get up, to limp the rest of the distance. This is a man who was being so violently injured that he could not help himself, and if he was left, he would die.

Three men, one at a time, come upon this man. One of them is a priest. The second is a Levite. Jericho was a priestly city, and there would definitely be a traffic of priests and Levites between Jericho and Jerusalem. Remember what nationality this man was - Jewish. What nationality are priests and Levites? Jewish. They are the same as this man ethnically,

culturally, religiously. They have all the things in common which the lawyer regarded as qualifying as a neighbour. The lawyer asked, and who is my neighbour? In his heart, he believed the answer was, he who is close to me racially, culturally, religiously. He is my neighbour, and he is the one I must love. If I do not love people who don't fall into those categories, I haven't disobeyed.

But what do these two men do? Both of them see the wounded fellow-Jew, and they cross the road so as to avoid the man and his pitiful state. They harden their hearts against him, and fill themselves with indifference. "Not my problem. Sorry for him, but nothing I can do."

And now Jesus describes the third man, which could only have brought some shocked gasps and frowns from his audience - the Samaritan. Now who were the Samaritans? The Samaritans were the descendants of the Assyrians who had intermarried with the remaining Jews after Israel was taken into captivity. They developed their own religion – taking the five books of Moses and rejecting the prophets. They set up their own Temple at a place called Mount Gerizim. Jews considered Samaritans half-breed traitors. Samaritans considered Jews their enemies. In John 4 we read that "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans."

You have to understand, Jesus is making the hero of the story a man who was the enemy of the Jews. It would be like telling this parable to Irish Catholics, and making this man an Irish Protestant. Or telling the story to Serbs and making this man a Croat. Or telling it to Rwandan Hutus, and making this hero a Tutsi. Or telling it to modern Israelis, and making this man an Arab Jihadist. The Samaritan is as far removed from the Jew lying in the road as can be. They are different racially, religiously, culturally. But as we find out, he is the only one who is a neighbour to the wounded Jew.

What point is Jesus making? Your neighbour is not just the man you have much in common with. Your neighbour is not only the one you get along with without any problems. Your neighbour includes the person who is opposite of you racially, religiously, culturally, and politically. Your neighbour is the person furthest from you in every way, and everyone in between.

So who is it then that we must love? Who is it that we must give the gospel to, and reach with the news of Jesus Christ? When we, willing to justify ourselves before the Lord, might say, and what neighbour must I take the gospel to? Who must I love enough to inconvenience myself to take the message to? Who is my neighbour? Jesus' answer is: the person furthest from you in every way, and everyone in between. He is your neighbour. She is your neighbour.

The story of missions is a story of former enemies crossing borders and ethnic boundaries to get the gospel to each other. The story of missions is the gospel conquering what divided, as men see that one on the other side of the globe as my neighbour.

II. How to Treat Your Neighbour

33 "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 "So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 "On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' 36 "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" 37 And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

What did this Samaritan do? He first experienced something emotionally. Verse 33 says, “He had compassion.” Compassion means to suffer together. This Samaritan, put himself in the shoes of the Jew. He got inside the man's experience. He felt his pain and suffering as his own.

Remember the command, “Love your neighbour as yourself”? He felt for the wounded Jew, as if it were himself. He saw the man's state. But the Levite and the priest had also seen the man's state. What was the difference? The Samaritan imagined himself in that pain. The Samaritan had compassion, he had sympathy – which means to feel with. The difference between indifference and compassion is to love your neighbour as yourself. What would it feel like to be this person right now? What emotions, what confusion, what feelings, what pain, what despair is it to be in their shoes?

When you think of your neighbours – that is – the people who are furthest from you and everyone in between, have you considered what it is to be them? Have you considered their state? This is what Jesus did so often, which is why Scripture says he was moved with compassion.

Before you look at the seemingly untroubled, wealthy and satisfied lives of the unbelievers you know, consider how God describes the unbeliever:

Ephesians 2:1-3 *Ephesians 2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.*

Ephesians 2:12 ¹² *that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

Ephesians 4:17-19 ¹⁷ *This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; ¹⁹ who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

Look at your neighbour again. He might be driving a BMW. He might have a holiday home in Plet and take trips to Europe every six months but that's irrelevant, he's dying. Every day he has is one less before he faces God. As far as God is concerned he is poor, naked, and wretched. His eternal bank account is bankrupt. He has nothing to save him. He is storing up more anger everyday. He is without hope and without God. He might have an IQ of 150 but his mind is given to what is worthless, futile, vanity. He is stumbling about in God's universe, clueless as to what it is because of his ignorance and rebellion. His conscience is hard, and sin comes easily to him. He is tearing up his soul and hurting himself more and more everyday.

What is it to be him? You know, because you were once him. Has it been so long that you have forgotten? Could a modern-day version of this parable substitute a Christian in place of the priest and the Levite?

The Samaritan experienced something emotionally, but then he also did something practically. Once he had felt what it was to be this person, he did what he would want

someone to do for him. He loved his neighbour as himself. His neighbour needed mercy, and he showed it.

Look at some of the details of what he did to show mercy.

And when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 "So he went to him

He interrupted his own day. He was on a journey, no doubt with his own things to do. But once he felt compassion, he interrupted himself. If you were in a state of misery, would you not want people to stop what they are doing to help you? He did not use his own schedule as a reason to be indifferent. God had placed this man in his path, and he responded.

34 "So he went to him

He went to the man. A simple statement, but the opposite of what the others had done. He did not try to avoid the man's misery, but headed for it. Like Jesus with our sin, he came to the problem; he did not avoid it.

and bandaged his wounds,

He got dirty and entered that man's world. The moment he saw the man, he must have known that he was not going to come out of this clean and untouched. To help a man who has been stripped naked and is bleeding to death means you get down from your donkey, get dirty, get your clothes full of blood, tear off strips of your clothes to make bandages.

pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 "On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'

He used his own resources. He takes some of his own oil and wine, that he would have used for his own drinking and anointing himself in the heat, and uses them as antiseptics. He is going to be thirsty and dry, so that this man can live. He puts him on his own donkey. What does that mean for him? He'll be walking the difficult journey down to Jericho.

He gets him to an inn, so that the man can have a place to lie down and recover. He obviously has to pay for himself and for that man, he is to take care of the man. He further commits himself to pay all the expenses associated with the man's recovery.

He went as far as he needed to meet his need. You see, he had compassion. He placed himself in the shoes of the wounded man, and knew – this is what I would need, if I were the wounded man. At least this far, is what I would want, if I had been robbed, stripped, and wounded.

Now Jesus asks the same lawyer this question:

36 "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" 37 And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

It turns out being a neighbour is not defined by geographical or ethnic or cultural boundaries. It's defined by treating your neighbour as you would want to be treated. Your neighbour is the one furthest from you in every way, and everyone in-between, and you act like a neighbour

when you show the mercy on your neighbour that you would want for yourself. Giving a person mercy is meeting their needs, in spite of his deservedness or the cost to yourself.

Who is your neighbour? It's everyone. It's the people you feel least affinity to. How do you treat your neighbour? With all the mercy you would want extended to yourself.

Imagine that a terrible disease comes to South Africa. It spreads with lightning speed, and before you know it, you are suffering from it, as are your children. Then you meet a friend, who seems to be doing well. You ask him how he has escaped this pandemic, and he says he received inside information about it months ago, and received the vaccine. You ask him why he didn't tell you, and he says, "I didn't think you'd believe me. I didn't think you'd be interested. Besides, I thought it might make things awkward between us." What would you say to him?

No, the unbelievers around us do not want God. They are not seeking Him. But they need Him. Their lives are meaningless and empty without Him, and they will face Him as rebels when they die. They need to hear the gospel.

That means interrupting your life and being involved with unbelievers. As the Samaritan stopped and went to the man, so Christians need to stop and seek to get to know unbelievers. Do some of your shopping at the same store, maybe a smaller shop, where the store owner gets to know your face, and conversations become more likely. If you are able to take walks in your neighbourhood, walk the same route, and greet some of the neighbours you might come across. A regular presence and a friendly greeting. Try to get to know your immediate neighbours, do them some favours. Have them over for a meal. If your children have made friends at school or somewhere else, and you're fairly sure their parents aren't saved, invite them all over for birthday parties. Attend your children's extra-mural events when you can. If you have a particular interest or a hobby that could connect you with groups of people, go ahead and join up. You get to do the thing you enjoy, and yet get to know unbelievers, who get to know you, which is the most important part. Think of ways to be a blessing to some of the community services around you – your local police station, fire-station, hospital. Certainly, people work in shifts there, but if you show up from time to time to offer help, to give a word or a note or a gift of appreciation, you will probably open up some doors.

This is stopping. It's interrupting your life, your family, your schedule to become ministry-minded. Here are people who will not enter a church. The church is supposed to go to them.

And then, just as that man got dirty bandaging wounds, you have to know it is messy to build bridges to the unsaved. They say things which offend us. They like things we don't like. They laugh at coarse things. They want to listen to and watch what we don't. And without compromising, you have to enter their world and show them that you love them, that you are not allergic to them. It is messy to do it this way. A lot easier to give a person one tract and demand they repent, and feel you've done your job.

Then, you use your own resources – your own time and money, to build a friendship with someone, when there's nothing in it for you, and in spite of how obnoxious the unbeliever might be to you, because you want for him what was done for you. You might eventually get to introduce them to the person of Jesus through a Bible study. And it might take up one of your evenings or Saturdays. It will cost you. How far will you go? How far would you have

wanted someone to go with you to help you to understand, and overcome your objections with a life of love.

How do you get this love for your neighbour?

In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, "Do not waste your time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less."

Then, we pray that God would give us His love for them.

David Brainerd was a missionary to the American Indians. He laboured feverishly amongst them until he died at the age of 29. Listen to just two of his journal entries:

November 2, 1744. "About noon, rode up to the Indians; and while going, could feel no desires for them, and even dreaded to say anything to 'em".

"Friday, June 18. Considering my great unfitness for the work of the ministry, my present deadness, and total inability to do any thing for the glory of God that way, feeling myself very helpless, and at a great loss what the Lord would have to do; I set apart this day for prayer to God, and spent most of the day in that duty, but amazingly deserted most of the day. Yet I found God graciously near, once in particular; while I was pleading, for more compassion for immortal souls, my heart seemed to be opened at once, and I was enabled to cry with great ardency, for a few minutes.--Oh, I was distressed to think, that I should offer such dead, cold services to the living God! My soul seemed to breathe after holiness, a life of constant devotedness to God".

What would the wounded man's response have been to the Samaritan, had he met him? What would the response of an unbeliever be to you if you do the spiritual equivalent for him?

Your neighbour is everyone – near and far. Being neighbourly is showing him the mercy you would want for yourself.