



## **THE GOOD BAD GUY**

Today we kick off our 2022 Lent series, and again we'll be looking at the parables of Jesus. And we begin with a story which is so relevant to the divided times in which we live:

### **Luke 10:25-37**

Have you ever known someone it was hard to like? Stupid question, I know. Because for all of us, there are people we love to be with; people we have to be with; people we would rather not be with; and people we avoid like the plague. And yet the 2 greatest commands in the Bible are to love God with all our heart, soul and strength (Deuteronomy 6:4), and this one: to love our neighbour as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18). So what exactly does that mean? How can we be expected to do it? Are there any exceptions?

That's what lies at the heart of the question asked by this *Torah* expert: "Who is my neighbour?"

In reply, Jesus tells this story, in which a Jewish man, making his way from Jerusalem to Jericho, is attacked by robbers, stripped, and left for dead. And 2 men turn up, each riding a donkey: a Priest, a head-honcho in the Jerusalem Temple; and a Levite, an assistant to the Priest. And they both ignore the injured man. Why? Because there was the possibility he was a Gentile, dead, or both – either way, he would have made them unclean, and that would have meant a 7-day washing ceremony outside the Temple, with all the other 'unclean people.' So, to avoid the shame, they avoid the man.

But then, in vs33, the very centre of the story, another man comes along - at which point the boos and hisses start.

Why? Because this man is ... a Samaritan.

And Jews and Samaritans did not get on very well. Jews saw Samaritans as a mix of Jew and non-Jew; and Samaritans saw Jews as invaders who had evicted them when the latter returned from exile in Babylon. As a result, a hatred had developed between the 2, you had Jewish areas and Samaritan ones, and atrocities were committed on both sides. Think Israelis / Palestinians. Or Catholics / Protestants. Or Ukrainians / Russians. Or US / Canadian ice-hockey teams.

So, a Samaritan approaches. But unlike the Priest and the Levite, the Samaritan is willing to help.

What does this teach us about loving our neighbours as ourselves?

**1) It's A Caring Thing.** When the Samaritan sees the Jewish man lying in the road, we're told that he takes pity on him. The Greek for 'pity' here is *splangkhnidzomai*, which I know sounds like a sneeze but actually means 'churning spleen.' So, a better translation would be: "His stomach turned over for him." The Samaritan is hurting for this guy; putting himself in his sandals; he's feeling his pain.

Loving your neighbour means doing the best for someone, even when you don't know them; or when you won't get anything in return; or when they don't deserve it (or they deserve the complete opposite). That doesn't mean being a doormat or a punchbag, but it does mean treating others as you would want to be treated yourself (Matthew 7:12). And if it doesn't come naturally, ask God to help you.

It may seem a crazy thing to do (the world would agree).

But as far as Jesus is concerned, this is love.

**2) It's A Costly Thing.** Love can be an expensive venture. And I'm not just talking a heart-shaped box of chocolates. Or a beautiful bunch of flowers. Or an expensive bit of bling. Look at what it costs the Samaritan. It costs:

- **His resources** (oil, wine, bandages).
- **His effort** (he gives his donkey to the Jewish man).
- **His status** (only a servant would lead a donkey).
- **His reputation** (what would other Samaritans think?).
- **His time** (he had to find a place for the man to stay).
- **His cash** (he had to pay for the man's lodgings).

What we're talking about here is sacrificial action (that's what the Hebrew *ahavah* and the Greek *agape* mean). So what might that look like for us? What might 'true love' cost? It might cost us our dreams and ambitions. It might cost us the chance to do our own thing. It might cost us the argument that's not worth winning anyway.

Ultimately, it might cost us everything we have.

**3) It's A Christ-like Thing.** The Samaritan takes the Jew to the nearest inn. Now here's an interesting fact: there were no inns between Jerusalem and Jericho. The nearest stops were either Jerusalem one way or Jericho the other – and both were Jewish strongholds. Do you know what would have happened to a Samaritan found in one of those cities? His brains would have been smashed out.

So the Samaritan heads off on a suicide mission; pays the inn-keeper 2 *denarii* to look after the man; and goes. What happens next? Does he make it out alive? We're not told – but there's the possibility he doesn't.

And you might be thinking, "I could never love like this."

And maybe that's the point. Maybe there's only one man who can.

Like the Samaritan, Jesus stepped into enemy territory to save us, heal us, pay for us, and ultimately die for us. But – and this is vital – it doesn't take away the need for us, in His strength, to do the same (as John 15:12 makes clear).

### **The Moral Of The Story ...**

Jesus wraps things up with another question. What does He ask? "Which of these was a neighbour in need?" No. He asks, "Which of these was a neighbour to the man who was robbed?" He opts for the more challenging question instead. And the answer is: "The one who showed him mercy" (the expert couldn't even bring himself to say the 'S' word). At which point Jesus says, "Go and do likewise."

I.e. the question here is not, "Who is my neighbour?" It's, "What kind of neighbour am I?"

In our broken world, it can be easy to see the issues in another. And don't get me wrong: that may be perfectly justified. But chances are we can't do much to change that. But we can change the issues in us (or at least, Jesus can, right?).

Because in this we are all the same: we all need Jesus.

Some of you will remember the Rwandan genocide that took place in the 1990s, when almost a million Tutsis – men, women and children - were butchered by their Hutu neighbours in the space of a few weeks. In the years that followed, the Rwandan government set up 'reconciliation villages', where victims and perpetrators could choose to live together. And one of the governing principles in those villages was that there are no Hutus or Tutsis – just Rwandans.

Just neighbours.

So ... what kind of neighbour are *you*?