

The Compassionate Samaritan

Jonathan K. Dodson | Luke 10:25-37 | June 9, 2019

Need for Compassion

Before we jump into the parable, notice we have this story because an expert in Jewish law asked a question, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” It’s an interesting question, some might argue the greatest of questions. Cultures have sought the answer to some form of his question for centuries. Jesus responds by turning the question back on him, “How do you read it? The lawyer responds, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (27). Nailed it. He has *great* doctrine. He combined two great commandments of the OT: love God with everything (Deut 6) and love your neighbor (Lev 18), what Jesus later describes as the greatest commandments (Matt 22:37-40). If you want eternal life, you’ve got to love God with everything and love everyone. The question is settled. Conversation over. Jesus says as much, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live” (28). But the lawyer asks another question, Who is my neighbor? It’s interesting he doesn’t ask, *How* do I love him with everything? Instead, *who* is my neighbor? Jesus replies: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead” (30). Immediately, we are confronted with *a need* for compassion. The man lay stripped, bleeding, robbed on a road known for its danger, in such awful condition he’s described as half dead. So, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus *shows us a person in need*. He doesn’t give the person a name, an ethnicity, an income. Just a person in need. The application is universal. Love your neighbor excludes *no one* (not race, religion, orientation, party)! Do you know a person in need—that’s *your* neighbor: a struggling friend, an aging parent, a neglected child, abused spouse, oppressed minority? I think of one gentlemen in our mercy ministry who was living a normal life then had a seizure, lost tons of weight, sense of direction, and income. Can’t work. People of CL cared for him, visited him, pray with him, provide some coaching, welcomed him and his family into their lives. The city has a history of discrimination against African-Americans and Hispanics. And prejudice doesn’t just lie in the past; it’s present today in the displacement of these minorities from the Eastside. The bleeding, stripped, the kicked down of our city—*our* neighbors. Then there are our global



neighbors, people in even greater need. I know a mission leader who's been working in Malaysia for a decade to stimulate the economy and provide jobs for the poor. He describes his neighbors as facing "crushing unemployment." Our elders are working to iron out a partnership to come alongside his work. We partner with some key organizations like Shop with Care, ReWork. City Groups have a strategic mercy ministry to people in need; we partner with: Foundation Communities, Manchac 2, Austin Street Youth, Food Bank, Austin Angels, and more. What if you're not into your CG's ministry? It doesn't really matter; its not about you; its about people in need. If you're not involved ask a CG leader how you can support the work. There's tremendous *need for compassion*.

Nature of Compassion

Now when a priest walks by the man in need, he passes over to the other side avoiding him altogether. The Levite, a person from the priestly class, does the same thing. Why? Well, the mention he's "half dead" brings to mind Levitical law regarding corpses: they were not to be touched or you'd be ceremonially *unclean* for seven days. These priests had God's work to do in the temple. So, they're being true to God's Word...but not *all* of it. They could see the man is half alive. Jews were obligated help those who were endangered *and* to bury a neglected corpse. We cannot pick the parts of Scripture we want to live by and reject the parts we do not. That makes us God, but he demands we love the him with all our heart, mind, soul, strength *and* neighbor as ourselves. Look at the Samaritan. The first thing we learn from him is he felt compassion. Compassion **feels**. The word is *splagitzomai*, to feel it in the gut, in the soul. [Jesus looked on the crowds, harassed and helpless and had compassion for them \(Mt 9:36\).](#) [The Father of the prodigal son didn't stand on the porch waiting for his son to make it home, but felt compassion and ran after him \(15:20\).](#)

Compassion feels and compassion **acts**. It's different from pity. The priests may have felt pity telling themselves, I'm already giving to my local church, so I'll leave him for someone else to attend to. Pity feels and cuts a check, but compassion feels and comforts a person. It doesn't just say a prayer; it puts an arm around the suffering. It's easy to come up with excuses for things we don't want to do. Perhaps you've excused yourself repeatedly from serving in a mercy ministry, or turned the other way when seeing someone begging at a stoplight? If so, you may lack compassion. Compassion feels, acts, and **sacrifices**. Notice



what the Samaritan gave up: *possessions* (oil & wine), *comfort* (walked, the man in need rode), *money* (two days wages to put him up), *time* (gets to his destination late). And he didn't even post it on Instagram! Many of us would pat ourselves on the back if we did just one of these things, which shows we possess more pity than compassion. Back to the priest and Levite. Why *did* they leave him there? Maybe they were *afraid* if they stopped *they* might get mugged. To be Christlike is to embrace sacrifice and face our fears. Now we need not be foolish. Out of compassion, I once picked up a homeless guy who asked me to take him to an apartment complex, he got out by my window, and another stranger appeared and got into my passenger seat, demanding my money. It's one thing to be foolish; it's another to be fearful. Martin Luther King imagines the religious person asking, "What will happen to me if I stop?" But the Samaritan asks, "If I do not stop, what will happen to this man?" One is self-absorbed; the other self-denying. Sacrifice time, comfort, money. ReWork has cards on resource table you can give the homeless. Volunteer at ReWork. If we want eternal life, we have to face our fears love our neighbor. Its not enough to have great doctrine or keep ourselves clean; we must get dirty. Compassion feels, acts, sacrifices.

Necessity of Compassion

We've looked at the need for compassion, the nature of compassion and now the necessity of compassion. After telling the parable to the lawyer, Jesus asks, "[Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?](#)" (10:36). Notice he shifts the attention away from the neighbor to *neighboring*. He responds: the one who showed mercy. Jesus says, [You go, and do likewise](#) (37). This would have ripped the Jewish lawyer up. First, the person he's to emulate is someone he probably harbors prejudice toward. Samaritans were considered half-breeds because they were Jews who intermarried with Assyrians. There's a long history there, but suffice it to say Jesus is challenging his *racial self-righteousness*. He might be challenging yours. He also confronts his *religious self-righteousness* by comparing him to the merciless Levite. And he challenges *social righteousness*: Go and do likewise. Be just and compassionate. By now, we should be at the end of ourselves, crushed under the weight of inadequacy, desperate not just *to show* compassion but *to receive* compassion. For those who struggle to love their neighbor, who identify with the **priest**, your Bible reading isn't enough. For you, it's all too easy "love God



with everything” but neglect *everyone*. You see, compassion isn’t just neighborly; it’s a necessity. God wants to humble us with the compassionate example of the Samaritan so we’ll reach out for the compassion of the Savior: *Pardon for doctrinal righteousness*. And for those who think they’re good at compassion, who identify with the Samaritan, your compassion is not enough. You’ll face compassion fatigue if you rely on your natural strengths. You also need what the lawyer needs, divine compassion, to not judge others who don’t measure up to your standards, to be forgiven your self-righteousness. To step away and admit you’re not the Savior. For you, it is all too easy to say, I love my neighbor as myself, but fail to love *God* with everything (the greatest command). Jesus wants to humble you with the demand to love him with everything so you’ll reach out for his forgiving love: *Pardon for social righteousness*. In the end, priest or Samaritan, doctrinal or social, we all face the necessity of compassion—the pardoning love of God in Christ, who was beaten, robbed, stripped, and murdered, left full-dead, so we could be bandaged up, carried on his back, healed by his wounds, and brought to life in the endless love of God. Let’s go in the compassion of Christ.