

“The One Who Showed Him Mercy” – Luke 10:25-37

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com]

Take your Bible and meet me in Luke 10...

When I was a child, I can remember reading many books by Dr. Seuss. How many of you read Dr. Seuss growing up or to your kids as they grew up? He had a lot of classics, didn't he? There was *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish*, which gave an optimistic twist on the end of our day—"Today is gone. Today was fun. Tomorrow is another one." There was his *ABC* book, which included the cautionary tale of "Silly Sammy Slick [who] sipped six sodas and got sick sick sick." Then there was *Oh, The Places You'll Go*, which I think someone may have given me for my high school graduation, which told me (a bit naively), "You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose." When the weather is rainy (as it has been of late), *The Cat in the Hat* taught us to look on the bright side, when he said, "I know it is wet and the sun is not sunny, but we can have lots of good fun that is funny." Maybe you remember learning something of justice from *Yertle the Turtle*—"I know up on top you are seeing great sights, but down at the bottom we, too, should have rights."

But one that is among the most memorable for me is one that I didn't encounter until later in life. It comes from *Horton Hears a Who*. Maybe you know the line. "A person's a person, no matter how small." There's a story behind that quote. You see Dr. Seuss, or Theodor Seuss Geisel, wrote the book after visiting Japan in 1953, in the wake of World War II. During the war, Geisel was a staunch supporter of President Franklin Roosevelt. He used his creative gifts to rally Americans to the war effort against the fascism of Germany, Japan, and Italy. His cartoons were featured in many magazines and newspapers across the country. But, as one recent book explains,

"Geisel's work went beyond patriotism. In his cartoons, he presented Japanese people as less than human. His illustrations helped stoke an ugly anti-Japanese sentiment in the US, at a time when Japanese-Americans were ordered to evacuate their homes and were interned in camps.... Geisel's work was tinder for the fires of racial resentment. But when the artist visited Japan and met survivors of the devastating atomic bombs that rained down on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, on many tens of thousands of Japanese people, something changed inside of him. He saw humanity in people he had once considered subhuman. And so, when he returned to America, Geisel apologized in the clearest way he knew how. He wrote a children's book: *Horton Hears a Who*."¹

Now by no means am I suggesting that I would endorse everything in Geisel's life and legacy. I would not. Though raised Lutheran, there is little evidence of a genuine faith in Christ. But that signature line from that classic book is borrowing from biblical ethics that affirm the dignity of every human life. A person's a person, no matter how small. And if that is believed, then it profoundly influences the way we size up others. It radically changes how we engage with the needs of others. And today I want to show you, among other things, a bit of why that is.

To that end, let's look at the text. We have been studying this text for several weeks now. Today we are getting into the nuts and bolts of what the Parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us about what it looks like to be a good neighbor. There are three things we learn from the Samaritan about the nature of neighborly action and we will explore the first today. But the most important thing I will say to you is what I will say now, as I read the Word of God. Follow along as I read, beginning in verse 25. This is God's Word...

“And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’²⁶ He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How do you read it?’²⁷ And he answered, ‘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.’²⁸ And he said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.’²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’³⁰ Jesus replied, ‘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.’³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?’³⁷ He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You go, and do likewise.’” (Luke 10:25-37)

Now then, as we have seen, the lawyer has been answering Jesus’ questions correctly. When Jesus asks the religious expert to state who was neighborly toward the man in need, the answer was unavoidable. Even though the Jewish lawyer’s hatred won’t allow him to say that the hero of the story was a “Samaritan,” his answer nonetheless makes that fact clear enough. The one that proved to be the neighbor was the one who showed mercy to the man who fell on tough times.

For weeks we have considered some of the radical implications this parable has on our understanding of the obligation of the Christian way.

“Most importantly, it means we must not limit our love to the people we like to love. The parable of the Good Samaritan is the narrative equivalent to Paul’s command in Galatians 6:10 to do good to *all people* as we have opportunity. Not every need will be presented to us as dramatically and with as much ‘ought’ as a man half dead lying all alone in the road, but where need exists, race, nationality, gender, color, and political allegiance must not stop us from being the neighbor Christ calls us to be.”²

If the Samaritan is put forth as an example, then we must pause and consider how this man exemplifies what it means for us to be a good neighbor. What do his actions teach us? I would like to suggest three things. Here is the first one (and the only one we will address today)...

His Actions Were *Compassionate*

The first thing we must note about the Samaritan is not so much what he *does*, but what he *feels*. He feels “*compassion*” (Luke 10:33). This is what distinguishes him from the priest and the Levite. All three men saw the need. Only one acted on behalf of the one in need. The difference? Compassion. As Tim Keller reminds us,

“*It is not enough to simply know one’s duty.* The priest and the Levite had all the biblical knowledge, all the ethical principles, and [presumably] all the ethnic affinity with the man in the road. It was not enough. The Samaritan had none of these things, but he had *compassion*. It was enough!”³

Therefore, we have to conclude that the condition of our heart matters. Compassion is a byproduct of a heart that is functioning properly. “And the heart is where the lawyer was sorely tattered and needed redressed.”⁴ Perhaps ours does as well. In any case, if we want to be good neighbors, we must start by examining our hearts. When we see a need, does our heart beat with compassion?

The Greek verb used here for the Samaritan's compassionate feeling comes from a noun that means "inward parts" or "entrails" or "bowels." Have you noticed how your very emotional reactions can affect you physically? It's why people get indigestion when stressed or lose their appetite when depressed. And because of that connection between the psychological and physical, the word was often used to reference the seat of emotions within us, what we usually refer to as the "heart." The verbal form of the word is used here. It's a word used for intense emotion. Think "gut-wrenching" emotion tied to pity, sympathy, and tenderness. It's a heart response. The word is often used of how Christ felt toward people He encountered (e.g., 7:13). But it also shows up in several of New Testament parables in connection with characters that embody something of Christ's own attitude toward those in need (e.g., Matthew 18:23-25; Luke 15:11-32).⁵ This is what we see in the Samaritan. His attitude is Christlike.

The condition of your heart will often determine what you see, but it *always* determines what you do. So we have to take a hard look at our heart and seek to have compassion cultivated therein. Of course, maybe you're thinking, "Fair enough pastor, but truth be told I don't feel a lot of compassion for many of the needy people around me. It's why I don't do more for them. So how am I supposed to manufacture compassion?" Well, the truth is, you can't. Only God can. But God is a God of means and one of the main ways He cultivates compassion in us is through the memory of biblical truth. He uses meditation on biblical truth to fan the flame of compassion in our cold hearts. So what are some of the truths that help us address our compassion deficit. Well there are two I would like to point to this morning. Here's the first one...

RECOGNIZING THE IMAGE IN OTHERS CAN FUEL COMPASSION

What image? The image of God.

While our society loves to debate the nature of what it means to be human, there is not much debate that being human matters. "Regardless of your religious or moral framework, there is an instinctive sense within each of our hearts that whispers the truth to us that being human matters."⁶ Daniel Darling, in a book called *The Dignity Revolution*, gives illustration to this.

"Consider, for instance, our reaction to death. Why do we recoil when we learn of another mass shooting, another terrorist attack, or another natural disaster? Why do we feel deep pain when someone we love is lost to cancer or some other disease? Why do we demand justice when innocent blood is spilled? Have you ever wondered why our hearts are splintered by human suffering in ways that do not match the grief of any other kind of loss? Have you considered why our hearts are moved by human goodness in ways that do not match our joy from any other experience? We react this way because deep inside of everyone of us is a sense that humanity matters."⁷

This is why the United Nations was created 75 years ago. After decades of genocide, totalitarianism, and military bloodshed, this body, consisting of many of the leading thinkers and ethicists of the day, produced The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a statement that recognizes "the inherent dignity...of all members of the human family." How consistent the UN has been on matters of human rights is for others to debate, but there is no doubt that some good has come from it. Indeed, "human rights seem to be more defined, defended, and talked about today than in any other era in human history."⁸ We all agree that human rights matter because we all agree that humanity matters.

But *why*?

All those great thinkers and ethicists and philosophers seem to be able to agree *that* human dignity matters, but their voices lose their harmony when one begins to ask the *why* questions. In a book called *Neither Beast Nor God*, an ethicist named Gilbert Meilaender, writes,

“While these philosophers were able to agree on many particular claims, they were perhaps, unsurprisingly, unable to agree on ‘why’ these claims were true—unable, that is, to develop any shared vision of human nature or the human person on which such claims could be based...I doubt that there is any way to derive a commitment to equal respect for every human being from the ordinary distinctions in merit and excellence that we all use in some spheres of life; it is grounded rather, not in our relation to each other, but in our relation to God.”⁹

Bingo. Darling makes the same point when he writes,

“...there is no basis for human dignity without a connection to God. Without taking account of the divine, we are left with a view of a human’s dignity based on that individual’s merit or excellence, based on some societally-agreed or government-imposed yardstick; and if the last century teaches us anything, it is that this shifting metric is very dangerous.”¹⁰

He’s right. And a society like ours, that’s so fixated on matters of human rights, really needs what the church has to offer. “The Bible’s robust view of humanity is one of the best gifts Christianity gives to the world.”¹¹ And where does it start? At the very beginning. Listen to these words from the Bible’s opening chapter:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27)

Twice we read that mankind—in distinction from the rest of God’s creation—was made in God’s image. Men and women, in some mysterious way, bear the divine image. We are not God, but we are in God’s image. We are not animals or angels, we are creatures made in the image of God. That makes us unique. And that uniqueness is the foundation for human dignity. It’s the ‘why’ that alone explains that which everyone seems to agree on, namely, that humans matter. But we matter not because of what society says about us or what the government declares about us or what some international body like the UN decrees about us. Our dignity derives from our relation to God. And, yes, humanity has fallen into sin. And, yes, the resulting depravity does seem to distort the reflection of that image within us. But, nevertheless, the image remains as the Bible itself makes clear (e.g., Genesis 9:6; James 3:9).

“Fallen we may all be, failures we all are, but dignity we still own. There is no situation in which we may ignore the fact that every person is an image-bearing person. No disease or disability lessens a person’s possession of the image of God. We can never reduce someone’s humanity to their utility—to their usefulness to society. There is no exemptions, no asterisks, placed against the truth that man is made in God’s image and that this is where we derive our value.”¹²

It’s never a good thing—for us or our neighbor—when we forget this.¹³ And it changes everything when we remember it. Think about it, how should it affect us when we remember that every person we encounter today—including that person in need—is an image-bearer? How should it register with us when we remember that anyone created in the image of God—anyone—should be afforded personal dignity?¹⁴ Does it not help us feel more compassion when we see that dignity assaulted through attrition and neglect? If we see the dignity in that person who needs help, does it not fuel compassion in us? I’m reminded of what are probably the most quoted words from C. S. Lewis’ sermon entitled “The Weight of Glory”:

“It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor’s glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to...remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature, which, if you saw it now, you would be

strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping one another to one or more of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.”¹⁵

How does that change how you view your spouse? Your disruptive child? Your impatient boss? The person who does not share your political convictions? The homeless man you see on the side of the road? That person the thought of which brings the most hatred into your heart? These are not mere mortals. Immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.

If you can't love them for their own sake, love them for God's in whose image they were created. They are valuable to God, so value them for His sake. We can do unto them as we would do unto the Lord Jesus. Did He not tell us that what we do for the least of these, we do unto Him? Is not the Lord the one who “*shows no partiality to princes, nor regards the rich more than the poor, for they are all the work of his hands*” (Job 34:19)? Don't rationalize your inaction. Be like the one who made you. Let the world see His image in you, so that the world, as Jesus said, “*may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 5:16).

But it's not just our memory of the image of God that fuels compassion in us. Second, let me add, that...

RECOGNIZING THE NEED IN YOU CAN FUEL COMPASSION

Compassion flows from empathy. Even if we cannot identify experientially with the circumstances of another, we can imagine what it would be like if we were in their shoes. We can imagine what we would hope people would do for us in such situations. Empathy grows out of the soil of such mental exercises and compassion is the fruit of that growth. And our attitude affects our actions.

Jesus has already pointed us in this direction in the Gospel of Luke. Back in chapter 6, Jesus said, “*as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them*” (6:31). Does that sound familiar? That's the Golden Rule. It's what we considered last week. And what I wanted you to see last week is that the Golden Rule was given in a context that was designed to help believers sense their own need. That's not a coincidence. When we sense that we too are needy, we too are beggars in our own way, then it's more natural to feel compassion for the needy beggar in our life. It's easier to identify with their particular physical need, when we can identify with their spiritual need. We do know what it is like to fall short of what is required to attain the life we want and to be wholly dependent on the gracious effort of another to make things right. That is the Christian tale. That is the Gospel story.

We were spiritual beggars, impoverished in spirit and righteousness. Nothing in our hands could we bring to merit God's favor and earn His compassion. Yet while we were dead in the ditch of our transgression and sin, a ditch of our own making, God came down to earth. He came down our street. And He didn't pass by. He had compassion. He had mercy. He showed enemies like us grace. He raised us up by His own strength and began the process of making us well, financing the whole effort by the blood shed for us on the cross and securing our new life by His resurrected life. Though underserving, God restored our dignity. He gave us life. By grace and the gift of faith, we were saved.

So, Christians, you may not know what it's like to live with the specific need you see in another, but you have more in common with that person than the world notices. You both had the same need before God. You both are on equal footing in terms of inability to meet that need. You both needed Jesus. What a privilege to be given

opportunity by God to call to mind that gracious generosity we have received from God through compassionate action offered unto others. As John Ortberg reminds us, “The call of Jesus is to get as energized about someone else’s being the victim of injustice as you are when it’s you. In particular, be concerned about injustice to those you might be inclined to overlook.”¹⁶ Where would we have been if God overlooked us? Then how can we receive that gift that changes everything for us—from day one to all eternity—and withhold grace from others? We can’t unless we are suffering from Gospel amnesia.

Of course, we like to furnish excuses to justify our lack of compassion (and we will consider some of these objections down the road), but have you noticed how much we tend to presume about other people’s situations (i.e., what may have made them deserve it), even while we demand that others give us the benefit of the doubt. Besides that, many of those excuses we seize upon to justify our inactivity and lack of compassion don’t hold much water when we consider the Gospel. Even if all our assumptions are correct, were we any more deserving, grateful? Were we any less responsible for our situation? Any less selfish and indolent before God? “Christ found us in the same condition. Our spiritual bankruptcy was due to our own sin, yet he came and gave us what we needed.”¹⁷

Jonathan Edwards once put it like this,

“The rules of the gospel direct us to forgive them...[for] Christ hath loved us, pitied us, and greatly laid out himself to relieve us from that want and misery which we brought on ourselves by our own folly and wickedness. We foolishly and perversely threw away those riches with which we were provided, upon which we might have lived and been happy to all eternity.”¹⁸

Do you see his point? The compassion we experience in the Gospel, ought to make us more compassionate. The grace we have received, ought to make us more gracious. The freedom of God’s forgiveness of us in Christ, ought to make us free with our forgiveness. The cleansed record of our sins, ought to purge us of the desire to keep score. Freely we have been given, freely give.

But the motives matter. God’s not just after good deeds. He wants our deeds to flow from His grace. He wants them to flow from a heart of compassion that has been washed in the streams of His own compassion. And if we, as Christians, lack compassion, it’s in all likelihood a memory problem. We are forgetting what God has done for us in Christ. My hope is that our memory of the image of God in others and our own neediness before a holy God might fan into flame compassion in our cold hearts.

What better way for Him to thaw our hearts into overflowing warmth for others than through our memory of Jesus’ cross. And for that, we come to the table...

Let’s pray...

¹ Daniel Darling, *The Dignity Revolution: Reclaiming God’s Rich Vision for Humanity* (The Good Book Company, 2018), 14-15.

² Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 165-166.

³ Timothy Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 3 ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 15.

⁴ Josh Black, “Here Is Love,” a sermon accessed at the following web address:

<http://firstfreewichita.org/sermons/sermon/2017-07-16/here-is-love>.

⁵ *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 4:353.

⁶ Darling, 19.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁹ Gilbert Meilaender, *Neither Beast Nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person* (Encounter Books, 2009), 90, 95; drawn from Darling, 21.

¹⁰ Darling, 21.

¹¹ Ibid., 22.

¹² Ibid., 42.

¹³ “Everyone—no matter who they are, what they offer, or what they’ve done—has value and dignity because they were created by God. Nothing anyone can do or lack can change that. Everyone is an image-bearer. And everyone is a sinner; which means that every image-bearer finds it natural to think that everyone else (or even themselves) is not an image-bearer. And therein lies the seeds of every murder, every war, every act of self-harm.” Ibid., 44.

¹⁴ “Dehumanization, the active refusal to recognize the image of God in others, is at the heart of every form of exploitation. Although it’s especially obvious in the commercial sex and labor trade, where the individual is seen merely as a commodity to be bought and sold, we show that the seeds of dehumanization live in our own hearts every time we ignore the image of God in our neighbor....As the director of Justice Ministries at the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association, I am often asked, “What should my first step be in fighting exploitation?” My answer is simple: ‘Give value to those whom you have devalued. Show mercy because you have been shown mercy.’” Raleigh Sadler, “The One Who Showed Mercy,” accessed at the following website: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-one-who-showed-mercy/>.

¹⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 18-19.

¹⁶ Quoted by Duane Litfin, *Word Versus Deed: Resetting the Scales to a Biblical Balance* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 114.

¹⁷ Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 72.

¹⁸ Mark Valeri, *Works of Jonathan Edwards: Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733*, vol. 17 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 401; also quoted in Keller, *Generous Justice*, 73.