

'When the World Puts the Church to Shame

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into the parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke chapter 10, emphasizing the importance of showing compassion and love to others regardless of their background or beliefs. It highlights the need for action over mere knowledge, pointing out that even unbelievers can demonstrate more compassion than believers. The message stresses the call to be a neighbor to all, reflecting the love and mercy of Jesus in practical ways in a broken world.

Scripture: Luke 10:25, 1 Corinthians 13:2, Matthew 5:44, Galatians 6:2, James 2:14

Topics: "Compassion", "Being a Neighbor"

Description

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Transcript

Let's turn to the word. We're in Luke chapter 10. Luke chapter 10 and we'll read verses 25 through 37.

Luke chapter 10, 25 through 37. And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested him, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And he said to him, What is written in the law? What is your reading of it? And 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. And he said to him, You have answered rightly.

Do this, and you will live. But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor? Then Jesus answered and said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. And so he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

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

So last week we looked at the first part of that passage, where Jesus discusses the commands, and says that the first command is to love the Lord. The second command equal to the first, is that you love your neighbor as yourself. Now the man then said, wanting to justify himself.

This is a very typically, a very typical human response. The moment we are challenged by the Word of God, the moment we're challenged concerning truth, we seek to justify ourselves. And of course, the problem is, we cannot justify ourselves.

It doesn't matter how good an excuse you may have, for your behavior, or for your sin, or for your disobedience, it doesn't justify it. It doesn't make it right. It's become common language today, to speak about people, politicians, or movie stars, or whatever, who did something to redeem themselves.

We cannot redeem ourselves, and we cannot justify ourselves. The only justification is to be found in the forgiveness that comes through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so he's doing what lawyers do, and what people do, and that is just finding an excuse, trying to argue.

Jesus' statement was very clear. You need to love the Lord, you need to love your neighbor, and then he says, go and do it. Obviously he wasn't doing it, otherwise there would be no need for him to try and justify himself.

So the message got home, and the message touched the nerve. And so now he's got to try and justify his disobedience. And so he asks Jesus another question, and obviously, again, this is what humans like to do, and what lawyers like to do, and that is to engage in a debate, hoping that somehow in the debate we'd be able to squirm out of the position, or the place that we've been placed by the truth.

And so he says, well, who is my neighbor? Now obviously it's a trick question, because there's no easy way to answer this question, and I want you to see how Jesus answers it, and we're going to get to that near the end of the message. Now Jesus then tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, a parable that I think most people, even unbelievers, know. And I'm going to go through the parable very quickly, but before I do that, I want to just discuss very briefly how we interpret these parables, because there are different ways in which parables are interpreted.

There's only one right way. Parables are the most difficult things in scripture to interpret. We think they're easy, because it's a nice little story.

A sower goes out, and he sows seed. A man falls amongst thieves. A coin is lost, and the woman lights up a candle, and she looks for the coin.

These are easy stories, but the interpretation and the understanding of them is very difficult. And in fact, theologians and pastors make tremendous mistakes when it comes to how we interpret these parables. As you may know, hermeneutics or the interpretation of scripture is something that I feel passionate about, because all of our truth is based on the Word of God.

But not only is it based on the Word of God, but it is how we interpret the Word of God. Now when it comes to the parable of the Good Samaritan, sorry, the other problem is that there is no easy way, or there's no single way in which you can apply to all of the parables, and say, well, you know, the parable of the lost son, the parable of the sower that goes to sow seed, the parable of the Samaritan, just to use those three as an example. There is no uniform way to interpret all of those parables.

Each parable has a different dynamic, has to be interpreted in a different way. This parable is probably one of the most abused parables, because it is interpreted in what the learned people call in an allegorical way. In other words, every detail of the story is interpreted.

And that is what Augustine, one of the church fathers, began to do, and what is still popular today in certain circles. It's a little crazy for those who follow theology and church history, that those who follow Augustine today have rejected his way of interpreting this parable, whereas those who reject Augustine have embraced his way of interpreting the parable. Now if that doesn't make sense, don't worry about it.

If it does, maybe it's just a little interesting tidbit. This is how people like to interpret the parable. The good Samaritan must be Jesus, because doesn't he seek and save what is lost? He finds this man, and this man is obviously a sinner of some kind.

He finds himself robbed and stolen of, beaten up. And who beat him up? The devil beat him up, so Jesus finds the man. Religion didn't help him.

The priest and the Levite, they couldn't help him, but Jesus helped him. And so Jesus pours in the oil and the wine, and there's interpretations for that. He puts him on the donkey, and he takes him to the inn.

The inn is the church. The innkeeper is the pastor or the elders of the church. He gives him two denarii, two pennies.

A denarii is a day's wages. Now you got to follow me very sharply on this, because this is how involved they get. So he gives him two pennies, pennies a day's wages.

A thousand years is as a day with the Lord, and one day is a thousand years. So he gives the church 2,000 years worth, and he says, when I come again, then I will repay you anything I owe. So Jesus is going to go away.

He's going to go away for 2,000 years, then he's going to come back again, and he's going to square up with the elders of the church. Others interpret it a little different. They say, well, you know, the two denarii is the Old Testament and the New Testament.

My response to that is rubbish. While all of those things are true, that is not what the parable teaches. You cannot abuse scripture in order to teach truth, even if it is true.

Yes, Jesus picked us up when we were broken and messed up. He bound up our wounds. He places us in families, and he's coming again.

All of those things are true, but this parable has absolutely nothing to do with those things. And so you will hear many preachers like to preach it along those lines. Fortunately, it's becoming less and less popular today as we become a little bit more enlightened as to how to interpret the parable.

So let's look at the parable and see exactly what it says. Well, before we do that, let me explain to you another aspect of a parable. Let me go back.

Why can we not make all of those details about what's wrong with using this to preach the gospel about how Jesus picks up the broken and fixes them up? Well, simply because we're abusing the scriptures. Secondly, because we are missing the point. And so while we may be preaching other truths, the point that Jesus is trying to make here, we miss that when we get into all sorts of other avenues.

And then there are specific problems when you start interpreting the parable. Who was the man who rescued the wounded man? He was a Samaritan. A Samaritan is a half-breed.

A Samaritan is not a believer according to Jesus. Jesus said to the woman at the well concerning the issue of worship, she says, you don't know. Jesus says to her in John chapter 4, you don't know what you're talking about, you Samaritans.

So how can Jesus be a Samaritan? And we can go on and on. What is the donkey in the whole picture? You see, the moment you go down that road, you end up in all sorts of real difficulties. So how does this parable work? This parable works exactly the same way as a classical joke works.

Now please understand me, I'm not saying it's a joke, but it works like a joke works. Now I'm not a good one with jokes, and I can never remember any. But how does a joke work? Well, you tell a story.

And sometimes if you're a good storyteller and a good jokester, then you'll tell a long story, and then you get to the end of the story, and there's a punchline. Now all of the details in the story are irrelevant. They are simply a setup for the punchline.

They are simply to lead you along, and often what they do is they lead you along a certain line of thinking, and then the punchline comes and cuts right across it. And that's what makes it funny. Now I tried to think of an example, and I couldn't think of an example, but I'm sure you can.

So this is exactly how this works. Jesus is telling a story, and the story is that the religious man, the priest, comes and he passes by on the other side, and then the Levite comes and he passes by on the other side. Now put yourself in the thought pattern in the way that these people were thinking.

Remember that they are anti-religious establishment. That's why they followed John the Baptist. That's why they're following Jesus, because they saw the hypocrisy and the falseness of the religious establishment.

So Jesus says, there's this religious guy and this religious guy. So who is going to be the good guy in the story? Because obviously the story is structured in such a way that there's the bad guys and the good guy. Who's going to be the good guy? Oh, the good guy is going to be an ordinary Israelite.

An ordinary Israelite. That has to be your conclusion. Let me further illustrate how this parable would work.

And it's very difficult for us, because we know the story. We know the end of the story. But if Jesus came today, and he came to Los Angeles to tell us this parable, how would he tell it? Well, he wouldn't speak about a priest and a Levite, because those things really don't mean very much to us.

But maybe he will say, well, there was this Baptist pastor, and he passed by on the other side. No shade on Baptist pastors. And then there was a Reformed pastor, and he passed by on the other side.

Now, depending on where you're at, you may say, well, maybe the good guy was a Pentecostal, or maybe he was a charismatic, or maybe he was a house church guy. But then what would Jesus say? He was a Muslim. Somebody caught their breath.

Folks, this is exactly what Jesus was doing. What we regard Muslims, or Hindus, or other unbelievers, that is how they saw the Samaritans. They are people who are far from God.

They are not a pure race. They have an alternative form of religion, which is not the true religion. It has connections with Israel, but it isn't the real deal.

They have a temple, but it's not the real temple, and so on. They were as hated as, let's say, Muslims are hated by many people in the Western world today. And I could have used maybe some other example, but I think that that is the clearest example I could have come with.

Now, can you understand that if Jesus came to us today, and he told us that parable, we would say, this is terrible. How can he sanction a Muslim? How can he sanction a Samaritan, or a whatever? And that's exactly the purpose of the parable. It's the shock value.

It's not so you get to the punchline, and you laugh. But if you get to the punchline, you're shocked, and you're shocked to think about this again. So what is Jesus saying? He is saying that even the unbelievers show more compassion and are better neighbors than the believers.

That's exactly what Jesus is saying. Now, let's look at the parable, and I'm not going to spend too much time on the details, because it's important that we get the overview, so you can understand then that the details are not important. It's the bottom line.

That's the only thing that matters. If you tell somebody a joke, and they get to the punchline, and if you're analytical like me, you begin to say, well, what did that mean in the story? Why did he go over there? No, those things have nothing to do with it. It's all about the punchline, and here it's all about the bottom line.

And so let's look, and Jesus then answered, and he said, a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He doesn't tell us who or what he is. He fell among thieves who stripped him of his clothing.

By the way, this obviously is just a story. It is not a real account. It's not something that actually happened, although it may have been based, and obviously it is based on some truth, who stripped him of his clothing.

By the way, one of the things that I've heard pastors preach an entire message on the fact that he went from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jerusalem is about 3,000 feet higher in altitude than Jericho. Jericho was a place that God had cursed.

Remember, the walls came down, and God said it should never be rebuilt again. So they go from the place of God's presence to the place that God cursed. A whole sermon on that.

That's not the point. It's a beautiful picture and makes for a nice sermon, but it's not what the Scripture is about. So he fell among thieves who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, departed, leaving him half dead.

Now by chance, a certain priest came down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. The priests were obviously those who were of the sons of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi, and they were

those who served in the temple, who did the sacrifices, and entered into the holy place, and lit the lamps, and set out to show bread, and so on. And they obviously worked on rotation.

If you remember right at the beginning when we started Luke, Zacharias was one of these priests, and they would go up to Jerusalem, they would serve for a period, and then they would go back to wherever they lived. So this man is either going to or coming from his time of service. Now again, we make all sorts of stories about why he passed by on the other side.

Maybe if this guy was actually dead, because it seemed that he was in a coma or something. He certainly wasn't. He was down and out.

Maybe if he was dead, and he went close to him, he would be defiled, and he wouldn't be able to serve. But those excuses don't make any difference. The point is that he shows no compassion.

He shows no compassion. Now he was a student of the law. He knew the law.

He knew that the law required of all Israelites, and particularly of those of the descendants of Levi, to show mercy on those who found themselves in unfortunate circumstances. He knew that, and yet he doesn't pay attention to what he knows. And then a Levite.

Now the Levites were assistants to the priests. So they were of the tribe of Levi, but not of Aaron. So out of Levi's tribe comes Aaron.

He is the high priest, and his descendants become the priests and high priests. The rest of the Levites are the Levites, and they are effectively what we would call the deacons today. So they're taking care of the temporal stuff.

They're assisting the priests and so on. But they also understood the scriptures, and they taught the scriptures themselves in their local synagogues, and they argued and debated the scriptures. So again, he has no excuse, but he doesn't do what he's supposed to do.

He passes by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. Now you can see why I made this point about those who are, that we regard as non-believers.

Because if this was just another man, then Jesus would have said, well another man came by. But he specifically specifies him as being a Samaritan. And as he journeyed, he came where he was.

And when he saw him, he had compassion. He had compassion. Now this man did not have the scriptures.

They had part of the Old Testament. They had edited out most of the five books. They were left with a portion of Exodus, if I remember correctly.

They had their own reduced, edited version of the Old Testament. Many of them were not even religious. We don't know if this man was religious or not.

But certainly, there is within him some human kindness. This does not make him righteous. This does not make him saved.

This he has just basic human kindness. And he saw him, had compassion. And he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring in oil and wine.

Now in order to bandage his wounds, obviously, he wasn't traveling with a first aid kit. Presumably, he would have had to tear up some of his own clothing to be able to bandage the man. Again, Jesus is embellishing the story to show the extent of the man's kindness.

The man doesn't just throw down two pennies and say, well, friend, you know, get yourself some help. No, he actually gets off his donkey or off his mule, whatever he's riding. He helps the man.

He cleans his wounds. He pours in oil and wine. The wine is a disinfectant.

The oil soothes and he binds him up. He puts him on his own animal. And notice, it doesn't say what the animal is.

We assume it's a donkey or a mule. So he has to walk while this man is riding on his animal. And he brought him to an inn and he took care of him.

But he had other things to do. So on the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, two pennies, two days wages. And it seems that that would be sufficient for two to three months worth of lodging in a boarding establishment or in an inn.

And so he gave them to the innkeeper and he said to him, take care of him. And whatever more you when I come again, I will repay you. So not only does he fix the man and leave him where he is, but he brings him to a place of refuge.

He cares for him that night. He makes provision for him until he would be well. And he commits himself to the innkeeper to pay whatever is short.

So he's paying attention to every detail of trying to help this poor man, trying to restore him. So Jesus now answers with a question. And you'll see if you analyze the passage, if you go home this afternoon and go through what we dealt with last week, and then this week, you'll see that both of them are asking questions, and they're answering questions with other questions.

So Jesus's question is, so which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? And he said, he who showed mercy on him. Now, I want us to stand still at this bit for a little while, because this is the punchline. This is the bottom line.

And I freely admit that I had missed an aspect of this punchline for most of my ministry. It was just in the last three weeks that I've been studying this passage that I saw something which I had not noticed before. And you say, well, you know, I don't know why you can't see it, because it's right there.

Well, that's just the nature of the Scriptures. Sometimes we read the passage many, many times, and we miss some of the important things. That's the wonderful glory of God's Word, that every time we come to it, it is fresh and it's new.

Now, we have to then go back, and here's one of the little secrets about reading the Scriptures, is it's not good just staying where you are in verse 36 right now, and saying, well, this is what verse 36 says. No, it has to be read in this context. You have to go back to the beginning of the story and put everything in its right perspective again.

If you don't do that, you're going to miss something. So what was the question? The question was, who is my neighbor? Is that the question? Yeah, that's the question. Who is my neighbor? Now, what he was looking for was for Jesus to say, well, other Jews are your neighbor, or the other people who live in your village are your neighbor.

But what does Jesus say? Jesus does not define who your neighbor is. He says, you need to be the neighbor. Which of these three do you think was the neighbor? To him.

So the guy that was lying in the ditch was not the neighbor. The priest was not a neighbor. In a sense, he was, but he wasn't acting like a neighbor.

The Levite was not being a neighbor. But the Samaritan was being a neighbor. Now, here's the point.

The lawyer was concerned about trying to define the area of his responsibility, so that he could excuse himself and say, I don't have to be neighbor to those people, and I don't have to be a neighbor to those people. And what does Jesus say? It doesn't who's out there. It doesn't matter who you come into contact with.

You need to be the neighbor. You need to show the compassion. And you show compassion on whoever you come across.

And obviously, as I said at the beginning, what Jesus is also saying is that the priest and the Levite, in spite of their knowledge of the scriptures, in spite of the fact that they knew God from his revelation to them, and their involvement in the temple, and in the sacrifices, and in the feasts, they didn't practice anything that they knew. And here's this man who is an unbeliever, and he is a better Jew than the Jews are. And folk, here's the rub.

Here's the hard part. There are often unbelievers who act better than Christians do. It doesn't justify them.

It does, as it puts us to shame. When the Samaritan shows compassion, when the Jewish leaders could not show compassion, he is putting them to shame, and he's saying to them, your religion is useless. You have all the information, you have all the priesthood, all the sacrifices, you have all the privilege, you have all of these things, but there is no application, and therefore it is of no value whatsoever.

And that's the whole point of this passage that we dealt with yesterday, last Sunday, and this morning. Folk, you can know everything. You can have all knowledge, but if you don't have love, you have nothing.

You have nothing. And as we said last week, love is not a feeling. Love is not something I believe in.

Love is something that needs to be done. If you asked the Levite and the priest about compassion, about love, about mercy, they would tell you that God revealed Himself to Moses as being full of compassion and long in mercy and in long suffering, but they themselves didn't have an ounce of it. And folk, as Christians, we know about mercy on those who are out of the way and going astray.

We know about compassion because Jesus showed compassion to us, and yet do we do compassion? Do we do mercy? Do we do love? That's the point that Jesus is making. Now, you remember that when this whole thing began, before the lawyer says, well, who is my neighbor, what did Jesus say to him? Go and do it. And now He's going to end with exactly the same thing.

And He said, the lawyer said, he who showed mercy on him, and Jesus said to him, go and do. Likewise, do as the Samaritan did. Folk, this is a thing that needs to be done.

It's not something that we can talk about. It's something we need to do. Now, here's the thing.

In spite of the many words I've used this morning and the theological rabbit trails that I've gone on, the message is very simple. A child amongst us knows this message. This commandment give I unto you, that you love one another.

And not only do we love one another, but we're neighbor to whoever we come across in this world. It's simple. Children can understand that concept, but do we do it? That's where it all comes down to.

It's doing. And let me remind you again what we touched on last week, and that is that God didn't send the prophets to tell us about His love for us. God didn't send an angel to say, I have compassion on mankind who is lost and going astray.

No, He gave His only begotten Son. Jesus left His position in glory, left His throne, left His power, humbled Himself, and demonstrated God's love towards us. How often do we demonstrate God's love to those that are near us, let alone to those who are further away? And sometimes it's costly.

It took this man a day out of his journey. Obviously, he had somewhere to go. It takes him a day out of his journey.

It takes him to sacrifice one of his clothes, to give up two denarii, a lot of money. Sometimes it's costly, like when Jesus died for us at the cross of Calvary. But sometimes it just needs a word, just showing an act of kindness, just a phone call, just a prayer.

We can't give a smile anymore, but some act of compassion. I wish I could tell you a story of something that happened to me this morning, but it's too personal, I can't tell you. But an act of kindness, when someone did something for me that touched me deeply, and it wasn't about money, it wasn't about cost.

It was simply an act of saying, I care, I care. Go and do likewise. Father, we pray that you'd help us.

Lord, we cannot do this in our human strength. The Israelites and the Jews tried, and they failed. But Lord, I pray that you would help us and empower us to be Jesus to those around us, to show His love, to show His compassion, to show His mercy, not just in sermons and in preaching and in talking, but in real acts of kindness.

Lord, we live in a broken world, and Lord, it seems that this world has never been more broken than it is at this time, filled with violence and hate. And your church, unfortunately, seems to have bought into that deal of fighting and cheating and lying and seeking the destruction of others. Lord, help us to be Jesus in this world.

Help us, Lord, to be better than the world, to be peacemakers, to be those who bind up the wounds, to be those who love and care, to be those who seek and save that which is lost. We pray that you'd help us, Lord. And Lord, as we come to your table this morning to remember the price that Jesus paid for us at the cross of Calvary, make it real to us again today, Lord, I pray, and not just real in the sense of what Jesus did, but that we might be like Him, that we might love those that are unlovely, and that we may show compassion on those who are our enemies.

We ask that you'd help us, Lord. Continue with us as we come around the table now, Lord, and as we remember what Jesus did. I ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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