

Passing by on the Other Side

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of actively loving and serving others, and warns against the sin of omission, which involves failing to do what we should do to help others.

Scripture: Luke 10:30

Topics: "Love for Neighbors", "Action vs. Inaction"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the profound challenge of truly loving our neighbors, as illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan. He contrasts the actions of the priest and Levite, who passed by a wounded man without offering help, with the Samaritan who showed compassion and took action. Miller argues that love is not merely the absence of harm but the active pursuit of doing good for others, highlighting that neglecting to help those in need is a serious moral failing. He calls on listeners to reflect on their own lives and consider how often they pass by opportunities to show love and kindness. Ultimately, Miller urges that we will be judged not only by our actions but also by our inactions towards those around us.

Transcript

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'" Luke 10:30-35

No lesson is harder to learn--than the lesson of love. It may be found, too, that of love's lessons, those which refer to our fellow-men are harder to get into our life, than those which refer to God. It is easier to love one infinitely above us--than the one who walks beside us every day. We find it difficult enough to love our close personal friends in the full, deep, rich, constant, unselfish way that the divine teaching requires. Even in the tenderest relations, it is hard to be always patient, thoughtful, gentle, helpful--and free from envy and jealousy and all irritation.

Yet still more difficult is it--to learn the larger lesson of loving our neighbor as ourself. We like to settle for ourselves--who our neighbor is; and then we like to decide upon just the way in which we shall show our

love to him. But we really have nothing to do with either of these matters; we cannot select our neighbor, nor can we take our own way of loving him.

Many of us would like to write out love's duty to one's neighbor in a series of "You shall nots." This would make it much easier. It is not so hard to refrain from doing our neighbor harm--as it is to reach out our hand to do him good. With a little effort at self-control, we can resist the impulse to return blow for blow, to demand tooth for tooth, to repay unkindness with unkindness; but it requires very much more grace to give a kiss for a blow, to return kindness for unkindness, to repay wrong and injustice--with meekness and mercy.

In one of our Lord's wonderful parables, we have an example of loving by not doing harm, and set over against it, the true ideal of loving by doing good and serving. The story is familiar. Neither the priest nor the Levite did the wounded man any harm. It was the robbers who beat him almost to death. The men who passed by were good men, with kind hearts and gentle feelings. They felt sorry for the poor man. One of them lingered a moment, and told the sufferer that he was very sorry he had been hurt so badly. They would not have done him any injury for the world--this good priest fresh from his sacred functions, and this Levite with hands consecrated to holy service.

And yet somehow the story reads as if they had done something not just right, as if they had injured the wounded man in some way. When we think the matter through, we find that the Master means to teach us that we may do sore wrong to others--by not doing love's duties to them.

We do not think much of this kind of sins. At the close of the day we examine ourselves, and review our record to find wherein we should confess sin. We remember the hasty word we spoke, which gave pain to a tender heart, and also grieved the Holy Spirit. We recall our self-indulgence, our unkind feelings, our selfish acts, our envyings and jealousies, our impatience and anger, and we make confession of all these sins, asking forgiveness. But do we make confession of the things we did not do--which we ought to have done? Are we penitent for our failures to do deeds of kindness? During the day we have passed by on the other side of many a human need and want and danger; do we confess these neglects among the day's sins? The "other side" is too well trodden by many of us. The path is beaten hard by our feet.

Some people talk a great deal about perfection. They mean really only a life free from positive and willful sins. They do not think of that whole hemisphere of life, which in them is almost empty. Love is not only doing others no harm; it is doing them all the good that it is in our power to do. We are not taught to pray, "Forgive us our crimes," but "Forgive us our debts." Debts are what we owe. It is not supposed that respectable people will commit crimes against their neighbors; but when we look into the matter closely, we shall find that most of our days leave unpaid debts--debts of love; kindnesses or services due to others--but not paid, or certainly not paid in full.

The priest and the Levite did not hurt the wounded man--but they failed to pay him the debt they owed him. What they owed and did not pay--was the difference between their passing by in harmless neglect--and the noble service which the good Samaritan rendered.

It is well to press the application of the lesson very closely. All along life's dusty wayside, lie wounded men and women, robbed and left to die. We are continually passing by them. Which role are we playing--the priest's and Levite's--or the good Samaritan's? Take a single day's life, and see how many times we pass by on the other side. You learned of a neighbor in trouble. It was in your thought to go to him to offer him help. But you did not do it. The day closed, and there was that brotherly kindness which you ought to have

done--left undone. Yonder, at the ending of the day, your neighbor is still bowing in the darkness beneath his burden. He might have been rejoicing had it not been for your sin of omission.

Here is one who has failed, and fallen into the dust. There he lies, wounded in his soul, unable to rise. You know of him--he was an old neighbor of yours, a schoolmate perhaps. You have a vision of the possibilities that are in your old friend's soul, under sin's ruin, and you feel impelled to go to him in Christ's name. But you do not follow the good impulse--you pass by on the other side, and let him lie where he fell. Listen to the word of the Lord: "When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die; if you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at your hand!" You were not his tempter. You did not inflict the wounds in his soul. You did nothing to lead him into sin. Yet you knew of his wounding, his fall, his peril--and had it in your power at least to try to save him. But you offered no helping hand, spoke no word of love to warn him. You simply passed by on the other side.

All around us evermore, are human needs and sorrows which make their mute appeal to us. We are our brother's keeper. It will not avail as an excuse for us--that we did our brother no harm. That was not what he needed from us--security against being hurt by us. A little kindness shown to him, would have proved a wonderful blessing to him. The struggle was too much for his strength--and even a word of cheer would have helped him. He was facing the world's cold blasts, and a moment's shelter in love's warmth would have renewed his courage for what was yet before him.

It seems as if the priest, when he came near the wounded man, kept his face turned away, so that he could not see him. There are many people who do the same in these days. They refuse to see the misery and sorrow around them. But keeping ourselves ignorant of human needs, will never excuse us for not relieving them.

The Levite turned aside, and looked at the wounded sufferer, and said, "Poor fellow, I am very sorry for you. Are you much hurt? I hope some of your friends will come to help you." Then he went on. There is much of this kind of sympathy in the world. People express interest in those who are suffering, telling them how sorry they are for them. Perhaps they promise to pray for them. Then they pass by on the other side. Such sympathy is very cheap, and is as valueless as cheap. It costs to do good to others. We cannot love our neighbor as ourselves--and then save ourselves from self-denial and sacrifice. He who will save his life--shall lose it. The way to save our life in reality--is to give it out in love as the good Samaritan gave out his life. It may seem a waste, a failure; but nothing emptied out in love, is wasted.

But whatever the cost, we should never fail in a duty of love. We do grievous wrong to others, by withholding from them what we owe to them. There is a sin of not doing. We shall be judged, not alone by what we do--but also by what we leave undone. We need to give more heed to the active side of our life. We cannot cut ourselves off from our brothers. It is not enough to think of getting on in the world; we dare not seek to get on and pay no heed to those who are journeying with us.

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