



Making the Road Safe

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Biblical Texts

Luke 10: 25 – 37; Isaiah 58:6 – 12

Introduction

The story of the Good Samaritan or the Good Neighbour is familiar to most people. To those who have grown up in the church it was probably one of the first stories you heard in Sunday school. This story is also known – at least in name – in popular culture today. Someone who goes out of their way to help another person who is in distress or in crisis is known as a Good Samaritan.

But as is the case with many things that are familiar with us, we often overlook some of the more significant events of the story because we know how it ends and what the application is for us.

Today we are going to be looking at this story with fresh eyes – with eyes that are sensitive to the light of justice – and see if there is something new that we can learn from this familiar story.

1. Understanding the violent nature of the Good Samaritan story

The first thing that we want to explore is the violence that is associated with the telling of the story. In Luke 10: 30, the assault that is described is actually quite vicious. It was not just a few punches that fell upon the traveller, he was the victim of a violent assault.

Violence is repulsive to us. We are warned of pictures that are violent when watching news programs. Perhaps this traveller had broken bones, or was lying in a pool of blood. Maybe it was the repulsive nature of this crime scene that caused the Levite and the priest to cross the road and to not assist the man. Would you or I do anything different if we encountered this kind of scene on the streets of our city? Are there streets or roads of violence in our city or in the developing world where people are in need of assistance due to everyday violence?

Perhaps share a story from IJM's work or of a local story where violence has occurred. Recent stories of IJM's work can be found on our [blog](#)

2. The distinction between mercy and justice

The hero of this story is the Samaritan traveller who showed mercy to this beaten man. Mercy is the practical response to the immediate needs of people in distress. When we encounter people who are in need, it is mercy that we respond with to assist them at that moment.

However, there is another thing to consider in this story. At what point do we decide that we can't simply keep picking up those who are left for dead at the side of the road? When do we begin to work to make the road safe so that every traveller who ventures on to the road does not have to live in fear of being attacked? When we engage in the work of making the road safer, we are doing the work of justice.

In Isaiah 1:17 we see that seeking justice requires activities like defending the widow and orphan – the most vulnerable people in society. It means that we intervene on their behalf and protect them from those who would abuse their power and take advantage of them.

Jesus cared about both mercy and justice (Matthew 23:23). We are called to address both the immediate needs of people (mercy) as well as the longer term work of bringing justice to streets and roads of injustice. Are we as a church willing to commit to doing both mercy and justice? What are some of the challenges that we will face especially in the longer struggle to protect vulnerable people from injustice?

3. Justice leads to transformed communities and people

The work of justice will result in significant changes in our communities. In Isaiah 58: 6-12 we see that God is making a very clear connection to the work of justice and being a light in the world. When we give ourselves to the work of justice we are clearly helping those who are being enslaved, oppressed, and who are vulnerable to violence. But the scriptures also tell us that our light will break forth, our healing will appear, the glory of the Lord will be our guard, and the Lord will answer our cries for help.

In fact, in Isaiah 58:12, God says that people who pursue justice will rebuild ancient ruins and restore streets that are unsafe and in need of repair. Making roads and cities safe is what God is inviting us as his people to join him in. When we recognize streets and roads of injustice and violence in our own cities or in cities around the world we know that God doesn't want us to turn away from them, but to go and bring real transformation.

Conclusion

Will our church say yes to this invitation to look at the roads and streets of injustice in our city and in cities around the world and begin the work of making those places safe? Let us ask God for the courage and determination to fulfill the mission that has invited us to join him in.

