

Bi132 The Gospels I

Lesson Bi132-35 The Good Samaritan

Is love a feeling or an action? Followers of Jesus are commanded to love God. This love does not refer to an emotion, but to a demonstration—acts of love. As God demonstrated his love for us by sending Jesus, we are called to demonstrate that same kind of love to other people. The same word for “love” is used for our relationship with God, with parents or children, husband to wife, and between believers. The true meaning of this word is found in the story Jesus told, discussed in this lesson.

Jesus was asked an important question about love, to which he did not give an immediate answer. Instead, he asked another question to determine what the person understood about love, as well as their motive for asking the question. The concern of Jesus is not just with the actions of people, but the motive or reason behind those actions.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with your entire mind; and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” The answer to his first question was one he obviously knew, so to gain credibility he asked for a further interpretation. He asked, “Who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus told a story about a man going from Jerusalem to Jericho, a distance of about 27 kilometers (17 miles) and a descent from about 762 meters (2500 feet) above sea level to about 244 meters (800 feet) below sea level. The road ran through rocky desert, which had plenty of places for robbers to hide and wait for travelers. So the man in the story was attacked by 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, brought 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.”

The coins were equal to two days’ wages, which would keep a man up to two months at an inn.

So Jesus asked the scribe, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” In other words, who proved he was a good neighbor by his actions?

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him to go and do likewise (Luke 10:25-37).

Later, as Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to the village of Bethany, about three kilometers (two miles) from Jerusalem, where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “You are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or actually only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:38-42).

In both these stories, someone is seeking eternal truth about the kingdom, a man and a woman. In the first story, a scribe addressed Jesus. He wanted to inherit eternal life—not in the sense of inheriting something at another’s death, but to gain, or acquire it by doing some heroic act. The man asked Jesus this question to test him, before he would fully accept his claims. Jesus turned the question around, asking the scribe how he understood God’s greatest command. He answered correctly from Deuteronomy (6:5) and Leviticus (19:18) that people must first love God and then love their neighbor. Jesus commended him for his knowledge. Still with an unsatisfied heart and wanting to justify himself, he asked another question about who exactly his neighbor was. Jesus took this opportunity to get to the man’s heart by telling a story.

The story about the Samaritan is Jesus ‘answer’ to the expert’s question. Three people saw the condition of the man dying along the road, but only one of them stopped to help. The priest and the Levite, both Jews, served in the temple. To do so they had to remain ritually clean; this included not touching dead bodies. Perhaps they feared this man would die in their care. Perhaps they had important appointments in Jericho or Jerusalem which they could not miss. The Samaritan also had a schedule to keep, but took the opportunity to meet this unexpected need. He believed the human need along the road was of greater importance than his schedule.

The story shows that the person who was the true neighbor was a Samaritan. These were the very people most hated by the religious Jews. Jesus taught that the person who shows mercy is the real neighbor. The very question, “Who is my neighbor,” revealed that this man was not a person changed by God. Since his heart was not full of God’s love, he could not share that love with someone else. Love is the fruit of a relationship with God. God’s people cannot limit their love to include only those who are culturally and religiously like them. Moses made it clear that this command to love included not just fellow Israelites, but foreigners as well.

The second story shows that Mary and Martha, who already had a relationship with Jesus, had found in him the real source of eternal life. Mary, who sought more truth, wanted to listen to

Jesus, but Martha focused her attention on her earthly duties. Jesus responded that Mary's passionate love for God should not be discouraged. This may be a warning to believers to remember. Their greatest need is to be like Mary, to choose discipleship and time with their Master, rather than busy-ness for the church.

This story is **important** because it shows that the true definition of love is action—showing mercy, no matter a person's origin or situation in life.

The **main truth** of this story is that eternal life is not just a reward for good works, but a living relationship with Jesus that lasts forever.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What question did the legal expert ask Jesus to test him?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said the expert in the law asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, you are correct.
2. What answer did the legal expert give Jesus when asked about the greatest commandment?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said the expert in the law stated that the greatest commandment is to love God and love your neighbor, you are correct.
3. What did the legal expert say when Jesus asked, "Which of the three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered that the real neighbor was the Samaritan, the one who had mercy on him, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story and tell it to someone who does not know it. Then ask them this question, "What would Jesus say to the person who does not show mercy to everyone they meet who is in need? Will they have eternal life?" In answering, remember that person who doesn't know Jesus has the greatest need of all!