SM037 The Man Who Was Left for Dead

Jesus walked out of the Temple. The blindness and hardness of heart of the leaders and of many of the common people was a grief to him. He went away beyond the Jordan River where John the Prophet first baptized and stayed there. It was time to reflect and to think on next steps. He had told the people openly who he was. He was the one who gave the water of life. He was the light of the world. He was the Good Shepherd and he backed it up with his words of authority over evil spirits, his words of mercy to sinners in need of forgiveness, and his words of healing to those who were sick. What more could he say? What more could he do?

As he sat with his disciples in this place where John had preached and baptized thousands he looked out upon the people who were coming to him again. They came with hungry hearts and many believed in him. How he longed for more to come to the truth of who he was. There were so many to reach, yet so little time. And as Jesus thought on the great need in Israel, the next stage in his plan took shape in his mind. He had sent the 12 out on a mission to preach and to heal. He would do it again, but this time he would send out even more.

And so Jesus called the crowds to himself and he began to name names, not just the 12 but many more, 70 in all and when he had chosen them he said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. 3 Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no money belt, no bag, no shoes; ~~and greet no one on the way.~~ 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' 6 If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. 7 Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. 8 Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you; 9 and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' 10 But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 11 'Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.'12 I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city." 16 "The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me."

And so Jesus sent them out and for weeks they preached and performed marvelous wonders in his name in the cities of Israel. And when they returned they were full of stories of preaching and forgiveness and healing and some said with joy, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."

Jesus smiled and laughed with delight over their experience of bringing the kingdom to Israel. He said, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. 19 Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. 20 Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."

Copyright © 2013 Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, *Speak!*
Contact us at WGS ♦ PO Box 90047 ♦ San Antonio, TX 78209 ♦ USA
Web – www.WGSpeak.org email – Jonathan@WGSpeak.org

21 At that very time Jesus rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, “I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.” And then he turned to the crowds and said, “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

23 Turning to the disciples, He said privately, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see,24 for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them.”

What a season of joy it was, especially after so much confrontation in the Temple with the religious rulers. But this joy was to be short-lived for in the crowd were the men who were deeply suspicious and even openly opposed to Jesus. Some of these men were lawyers. When we hear the word lawyer in the stories of Jesus we must not think of our modern lawyers who are schooled only in the fine points of secular law. These were men who were experts in the laws of Moses. They were experts in religious and civil affairs for in those days there was no separation between spiritual matters and civil matters. Everything was part of serving God.

At this time, one of these experts in religious affairs, in the laws of Moses stood up and asked Jesus a question.

“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

This is a question that all of us ask, “What shall we do to inherit eternal life?” It was also a question that people of that day often asked the rabbis, and like a good rabbi, a good teacher, Jesus answered the lawyer’s question with a question of his own,

“You tell me. What is written in the Law of Moses that you study all the time? How does it read to you?”

And the lawyer, who asked his question, not because he really wanted to hear what Jesus said, but because he wanted to test him and perhaps trap him in a mistake said with confidence, “‘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.”

The lawyer had answered correctly! The lawyer had given the traditional answer that every Jew would give, and one wonders why he bothered to ask Jesus in the first place. Every morning and every evening a good Jewish man would say “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” They would also write these words along with the Ten Commandments on a small scroll, put it in a little box, and place it on the doorpost leading into their home. This was to be a reminder that when they went into their home they were to love God with all their heart. And when they went out of their home they were to love God with all their heart. They would also sometimes attach leather straps to these little boxes and

Copyright © 2013 Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, *Speak!*
Contact us at WGS ♦ PO Box 90047 ♦ San Antonio, TX 78209 ♦ USA
Web – www.WGSpeak.org email – Jonathan@WGSpeak.org

wear them around their arms or strap them to their foreheads, their daily reminder to love God with all their heart from Deuteronomy 6 and to love their neighbor as themselves from Leviticus 19:18.

When the lawyer finished answering Jesus' question, Jesus said to him, ""You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE."

The crowd, which had tensed up when the lawyer tested Jesus seemed to settle down. At first, they feared another confrontation between the religious leaders and Jesus. Jesus had left the Temple to get away from that but it seemed to follow him everywhere he went. But just when they thought this test was over, the lawyer, with a sly grin on his face said,

"Yes, but when it tells me to love my neighbor as myself, who am I to view as my neighbor? Who is my neighbor?"

"Who is my neighbor," the lawyer asked. It seems like such a simple question and for many it may seem like even an unnecessary question, but in the time of Jesus, this was a question that was debated and how one answered it revealed the deepest parts of the heart.

"Who is my neighbor?", the people asked. Of course, for the people of God, the Jews of ancient Israel, their fellow Jews were their neighbor. But after that, it was highly questionable if a man could be considered a neighbor. The Romans certainly weren't their neighbor. They had come into the land with the sword and conquered the people. The Romans were their oppressors. The Greeks weren't their neighbor. They had spread their pagan culture throughout the world and it threatened God's people morally. They were certainly not their neighbors! One rabbi, in the years to come would say that everyone was your neighbor, except for your enemies! That certainly didn't help answer the question! Another would go even further and teach that all heretics, informers, and renegades should be pushed into ditches and left to die.

Back and forth the discussion went among the rabbis of the day in Jesus time and for centuries after that. If a man was a neighbor, then you should love him as yourself. But if he was not a neighbor, if he was a Gentile, or a Jew who had fallen away into sin, he was not your neighbor and you had no obligation to love him as you loved yourself.

So, the lawyer says, "Jesus, if I am to love my neighbor as myself in order to gain life," how can I determine who my neighbor is? Who should I love? And who should I ignore?

And when we come back we will hear Jesus' answer which was a story – the story of the Man Who Was Left for Dead.

Interlude

The crowds grew close as the confrontation between the lawyer and Jesus intensified. They thought when the lawyer answered Jesus' question correctly, that he should love God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself, that that would be the end of the argument. But the lawyer wouldn't let it go. He and his associates often wrangled over who their neighbor was. If they could draw a line in the sand and

Copyright © 2013 Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, *Speak!*
Contact us at WGS ♦ PO Box 90047 ♦ San Antonio, TX 78209 ♦ USA
Web – www.WGSpeak.org email – Jonathan@WGSpeak.org

say everyone on their side was their neighbor and everyone on the other side was not a neighbor, then they would know who to love and who they could hate. Then they could justify their angry, prideful, and sometimes violent behavior toward those who were different from them.

And so the lawyer, wishing to justify himself, asked Jesus, "Who do you say our neighbors are?"

Jesus looked upon the man with sadness. He looked upon the crowds with sadness. Was this why so many had hard hearts? Were they so intent on drawing lines in the sand, on figuring out who was in and who was out, that they could not see and understand who he was and that he came to love and bring salvation to all people – both Jew and Gentile, Roman, Greek, Arab … all the peoples of the world.

What was the best way to reach these people? What would change their hearts? What was the best way to reach this lawyer? What would change his heart? A story! There is nothing like a good story to reach the hearts of people and so Jesus said to the lawyer,

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.

Now when the people heard Jesus begin his story in this way, their minds went to familiar scenes. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was 17 miles. It had many remote places in it which were far from any help. It was a difficult road because of its steepness. The road dropped 3600 feet from Jerusalem to Jericho in those 17 miles. The road was also dangerous because it was a favorite place for robbers to waylay travelers. One hundred years previous to this time, the Roman general Pompey waged a campaign to rid the area of such brigands. But no matter how hard he tried and many others tried, the brigands always came back and whenever anyone would travel this road it would always be better to travel with a group, or with guards, or to make sure you were never far out of the sight of others.

And if you were waylaid by robbers in this part of the world, it was better not to resist for if you did, you would be severely beaten and stripped of everything. Unfortunately, the man in the story must have resisted for he was not only robbed, but he was beaten senseless, stripped of all his possessions and all his clothes so that he lay naked and helpless and unable to speak at death's door.

And this is the problem that faced the three men who who walk by him in the story. Obviously he was a man who was in need, but was he a neighbor in need? In the ancient world, a person's nationality could be quickly learned in two ways, by their speech and by their dress. If a man approached you speaking Arabic, it was certain he was an Arab. If a man approached you speaking Latin, he was probably a Roman. If a man approached you speaking Hebrew, he was probably not only a fellow Jew and therefore your neighbor but also a priest, if a man approached you and spoke Aramaic, he was probably a fellow Jew and your neighbor, unless he was a heretic. By the man who was left for dead was unconscious and could not speak.

But if you could not hear a man's voice, then you would have to rely on his dress. From a distance, people could distinguish different nationalities by the clothes they wore. But what if the man had no

Copyright © 2013 Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, *Speak!*
Contact us at WGS ♦ PO Box 90047 ♦ San Antonio, TX 78209 ♦ USA
Web – www.WGSpeak.org email – Jonathan@WGSpeak.org

clothes and could not speak? How would one know if he was a neighbor? And such was the case with the man who was left for dead on the road to Jericho.

At that time, a priest was coming down the road. Every two weeks the rotation of priests in the Temple changed. The Temple had 24 rotations of priests who would serve in Jerusalem in the Temple for two weeks and then return to their homes to serve as priests in their villages. The priests were rich. They were the upper class of the people. This man probably had an entourage of people and guards with him. And he rode on a donkey for only poor people walked the entire distance between Jerusalem and Jericho.

Because he proceeding down to Jericho away from Jerusalem, he was finished with his two weeks of prestigious service in the Temple and was making his way home to Jericho.

Then the priest saw the man in the road. What should he do? He approached him carefully. He must see if he could help because the Law of Moses obligated him to give assistance to his neighbors who were in need. But the priest was presented with a dilemma. The man wore no clothes and was unconscious and so the priest could not determine his nationality. Was he a neighbor? Or was he on the other side of the line? Was he in the "out" group? How could the priest tell? But that presented another dilemma for the priest for the man did not appear to be breathing. He might be dead, and if he was dead, and if the priest touched him, if the priest even came within four cubits … six feet … of a dead man, then the priest would become unclean and would have to return to Jerusalem, declare his uncleanness to the other priests, find a red heifer, sacrifice it and burn it to ashes, and wait seven days until he could resume his journey home. What an inconvenience.

And so the priest, not being able to determine if this man were his neighbor by his speech or clothing, and refusing to take a risk to see if he might still be alive, turned away and left the man for dead on the road.

The lawyer listened politely but he was unmoved by the story. The priest was only doing his duty. His laws of ceremonial impurity were too important to risk. What if the man were dead? What if he were a heathen Gentile? Did not the writings of Sirach which many read in Jesus' day, say, "If you do a kindness, know to whom you do …Give to the godly man, but do not help the sinner."

Jesus continued, "Soon, another man came down the road. He was a Levite."

The Levites were assistants to the priests. They served in the temple with the priests as their aids in great numbers and when they would finish their service in the temple they would return home. They also had cleanliness rules although these rules only applied to them during their temple service. After they were finished the rules of touching corpses did not apply.

But the Levite had watched the priest from a distance for people travelling on this road never travelled far out of the sight of others and watched carefully for those ahead, looked to those behind, and looked around because of fear of robbers. And as the Levite watched the priest from a distance, he noticed that the priest did not offer help. And if the priest did not offer help, who was he to upstage the priest? And

Copyright © 2013 Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, *Speak!*
Contact us at WGS ♦ PO Box 90047 ♦ San Antonio, TX 78209 ♦ USA
Web – www.WGSpeak.org email – Jonathan@WGSpeak.org

besides, the man was without clothes and could not speak! He might not be a neighbor. He might be an enemy, a sinner, and you while you were to love your neighbor, you were to hate your enemy for they threatened you and everything you stood for.

And so the Levite approached, looked at the man on the road, could not figure out if he was a neighbor and passed by.

The lawyer and the crowds continued to listen politely, their hearts as yet unmoved by the story Jesus was telling. The Levite, after all, was only doing what a loyal Jew would do.

The crowds and the lawyer also knew that the story was not finished. Storytellers in that time often told stories with three main characters. Jesus had given two. Surely another was coming. And the crowds knew that the third person would turn out to be the hero of the story.

The crowd also noticed that Jesus started with an upper class Jew, a priest, then he went down one class to the Levites, still highly respected, and now, surely he would come down one more level to the common Jewish layman. They also served in the Temple assisting the priests and the Levites and many Jewish laymen would be on this road returning from their temple service.

But the crowd and the lawyer were not prepared for what Jesus said.

Jesus continued his story, "Then after the Levite left, a third man came down the road, and he was a Samaritan."

The people gasped! A Samaritan? Not a hated Samaritan! A Samaritan cannot be the hero of the story! The Samaritans and the Jews had had hostility for a thousand years. Did they not have a false temple in Samaria? Had not the Jews at one time destroyed that temple? And had not the Samaritans defiled the holy temple in Jerusalem just twenty years before when they scattered the bones of dead people in the courts of the temple?

"There are two nations my soul detests," a popular Jewish saying went, "and the third is not a nation at all. I detest the Edomites, the Philistines and the stupid people living in Samaria." Another person said, "he who eats the bread of Samaritans is like one that eats the flesh of swine."

But Jesus continued, "The Samaritan, was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.'

The people could not believe what Jesus was saying, not only did he introduce a Samaritan into the story but he presented him as the hero of the story. He was the one who had compassion, not the priest, the Levite. The Samaritan had rules of cleanliness also but it was more important for him to tend to the man than to maintain his own ceremonial cleanness. He went to the man, touched him, and discovered he

Copyright © 2013 Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, *Speak!*
Contact us at WGS ♦ PO Box 90047 ♦ San Antonio, TX 78209 ♦ USA
Web – www.WGSpeak.org email – Jonathan@WGSpeak.org

was alive. And to the Samaritan it didn't matter if he was a fellow Samaritan, a Jew, or a Roman. He was a man, made in the image of God and a man who was in need.

The Samaritan tended to his wounds, set him on his own donkey, and then led the donkey down the road to the inn where he cared for him more and then paid for two more weeks of rest and care until he could return and check on his progress.

Jesus finished the story. He looked at the crowds. He looked at the lawyer and he asked, "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" And the lawyer, humbled by what Jesus had said, replied "The one who showed mercy toward him."

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

Copyright © 2013 Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, *Speak!*
Contact us at WGS ♦ PO Box 90047 ♦ San Antonio, TX 78209 ♦ USA
Web – www.WGSpeak.org email – Jonathan@WGSpeak.org