

Authentic LOVE

Bible Glossary, People & Places

The Good Samaritan

Sermon Reference

A man who provided aid to a beaten and robbed individual on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, illustrating Jesus' parable of altruistic, unconditional love, as recounted in Luke 10:30-37.

Background Context

The term 'Good Samaritan' originates from the parable told by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Samaritans, during the time of Jesus, were an ethnoreligious group detested by Jews due to historical conflicts, intermarriages with foreigners, and religious differences. They were considered heretical and impure by many in Jewish society. This animosity can be traced back to the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the subsequent deportation of the population in 722 BC, leading to a blending of populations and religious practices.

In the parable, the Good Samaritan is depicted as a compassionate individual who, unlike the priest and the Levite who passed by, did not ignore a man who had been beaten, stripped of his clothing, and left half dead by the roadside. Despite the prejudices and hostilities between Jews and Samaritans, the Samaritan is moved with pity and takes practical steps to ensure the wounded man receives care and healing - he bandages his wounds, takes him to an inn, and pays for his stay. The Good Samaritan's actions break through racial, cultural, and religious barriers, going beyond the expected norms of society. His behavior is set in contrast to the religious leaders who would have been expected to help but chose to ignore the plight of the injured man. His example serves as the embodiment of the second greatest commandment, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' which Jesus identifies as central to the law and the prophets.

The story of the Good Samaritan has become a cultural touchstone beyond Christianity, symbolizing selfless action to help those in need, regardless of their background. It's a story that has inspired countless individuals and organizations to live out compassionate, altruistic values, even in modern settings.

Importance in the Bible

The Good Samaritan provides a profound and revolutionary example of what it means to love one's neighbor, which is a cornerstone of Jesus' teaching. It illustrates the core Christian ethic of love transcending all societal and cultural boundaries and establishes the expectation for believers to show mercy and compassion to all, regardless of social status, religion, or ethnicity. This parable has significantly influenced Christian social teaching and ethics.

The Priest

Sermon Reference

A Jewish priest who encounters the beaten man on the road to Jericho but chooses to pass by on the other side, avoiding involvement.

Background Context

In the Jewish religious hierarchy of the time, priests held a significant and respected role in society. Descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses, they were responsible for the administration of the Temple in Jerusalem, performing sacrifices and rituals as intermediaries between God and the people. Their duties were considered sacred, and they were bound by strict purity laws detailed in the Torah, particularly in Leviticus.

The priest in the parable of the Good Samaritan is notable for his refusal to assist the injured man. This lack of action could be interpreted as an adherence to the purity laws, where contact with blood or a dead body would render a priest ceremonially unclean and unable to perform his sacred duties. However, the priest's behavior is condemned implicitly in the parable for its lack of compassion and failure to live out the deeper and more fundamental law of love towards one's neighbor. His role in the parable is crucial as it highlights the tension between religious obligation and ethical conduct. It raises the question of whether strict adherence to religious law is sufficient when it comes at the expense of mercy and compassion.

The priest's actions, or lack thereof, serve as a counterexample against which the actions of the Good Samaritan are contrasted. The priest's decision to pass by the wounded man reflects a broader criticism that Jesus often voiced against the religious leaders of his time, whom he accused of hypocrisy and legalism. The indictment of the priest in the parable is part of a larger theme in the Gospels, where Jesus challenges the religious establishment to go beyond legalistic righteousness and embrace a love that is active and sacrificial.

Importance in the Bible

The priest's role in the parable serves as a caution against a religion that is ritualistic and devoid of compassion. It is a criticism of those who prioritize ritual purity over helping those in need and serves as an admonition to believers to embody the full spirit of the law, which is love and service to one's fellow human beings. The narrative encourages a faith that is demonstrative of God's love in practical and tangible ways.

The Levite

Sermon Reference

A member of the tribe of Levi who, like the priest, sees the injured man but chooses to pass by on the other side, failing to offer assistance.

Background Context

The Levites, from whom the Jewish priests were drawn, were one of the twelve tribes of Israel. They were set apart for the service of the Tabernacle and later the Temple, assisting the priests in

their duties. Unlike the other tribes, they were not allotted their own territory in the Promised Land but were given cities to live in and lands for pasture around these cities. The tribe of Levi had a special status because they were chosen to serve God in the religious ceremonies.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Levite's actions mirror those of the priest. He encounters the beaten man but decides to pass by, which could suggest an understandable, if not justifiable, concern for ceremonial purity or personal safety, given the danger of bandits on this notorious stretch of road. However, his actions also signify a failure to prioritize the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness—as emphasized by Jesus elsewhere in the Gospels.

The inclusion of a Levite, a person not only of religious distinction but also of esteemed lineage and social status, underscores the parable's message that social or religious status does not necessarily equate to righteousness. The Levite's behavior exemplifies a failure to fulfill the true essence of the law, which calls for active compassion and mercy towards those in need. The Levite's role in Jesus' narrative functions as an indictment of those who know the law but do not put it into practice in the way that reflects the character of God. It is a poignant reminder to the audience of the Gospel that adherence to religious duties without a corresponding expression of love and compassion towards others falls short of God's expectations.

Importance in the Bible

The Levite in the parable symbolizes the failure of religious observance when it lacks the compassion and love that should naturally flow from true religious conviction. He represents a misguided prioritization of tradition over moral imperatives, and thus serves as an example of the insufficiency of formal religion without the underpinning of genuine love.

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