

Text: Luke 10:25-37

Christ: Victim and Samaritan

We have before us one of those passages that is very well known by most of us and even by most non-Christians. I would hazard a guess that most English speaking people have heard in some form or another the story of the Good Samaritan. It's a particularly poignant story. A memorable story that came from the mouth of our Savior. But it is also a quite misunderstood story in many ways. If we went back to ask some of those who have heard this story just what it means for them, I wonder what kind of responses we might get. Some might say, "It means that we must show compassion on our fellowman if we are to follow God's will and to earn his favor." Another might say, "It means that we should stop on the highway to see if we can help at an accident scene. You know some states have a good Samaritan law that makes it illegal not to help if you have the proper training like a doctor or nurse." And another might say, "It means that we have neighbors that need our help and God expects us to give that help."

If we think about it, there is some truth in each of these interpretations. The problem is that if we followed up on this interview and asked them how often they have done what they say this story means how do you think they would answer. If they are honest they would have to say, "Not very often," or "Never." Because the truth is none of us has carried through on this Good Samaritan activity described by Jesus. Why not? Sometimes it isn't convenient. Sometimes it is too dangerous. Sometimes we don't have the time. Sometimes we are afraid to get in the way of the "trained" helpers. More often than not it's just that we don't really care that much about our neighbors in need. Oh we might give a buck or two to help someone, but to get right in there and give ourselves for their help. That's asking an awfully lot. We rationalize and say, "Jesus doesn't really mean that we have to get involved in the process. We just have to have our hearts filled with pity. Others can do the real dirty work. We can hire EMT's or police or firemen to do that kind of work for us."

But is that really what this passage is all about? Is it just a moral tale to evoke some temporary guilt from us? Or is there more here when we penetrate the surface meaning? I believe there is plenty more here than simply a story of compassion at work in this world. I see it as a story of the very ministry Jesus was sent to carry-out. Not just a ministry for the here and now of his or of our time, but a ministry of sacrificial giving of his own life blood on the cross for the redemption of our sin. Bear with me a few moments and I'll try to explain what I mean.

The first reason I came to this conclusion is the context in which Jesus tells the story. A teacher came to Jesus with a test in mind. He asked him, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus puts it back to him, "What does God's word say?" And the teacher quickly and resolutely gives the proper response from the legalistic moralistic sense. "Love, love, love..." Now Jesus knew as we all know that there has never and will never be a single human being who will be able to fulfill the law's demands to love God perfectly. He knew that the teacher's question was all wrong. There is nothing that he, or you or I can do to inherit eternal life. We can never be worthy of such an inheritance. So Jesus is really trying to show this teacher that his presupposition is flawed. And he is trying to show the teacher that there is only one way to obtain eternal

life and that is through the suffering, death and resurrection of God himself in the person of Jesus himself.

That brings me to the second point. The following story of the Good Samaritan is really a story of the love for mankind and the work of salvation of Jesus the Savior himself. Jesus is himself the victim of the crime perpetrated on that road to Jericho. Jesus is himself the Good Samaritan who saves that victim from death and destruction. Let's consider the story from that perspective for a little while.

Jesus is the victim. When Jesus came down from heaven to carry-out the plan of salvation he was like the man who was on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jerusalem was considered the place of God's habitation among the Jews. It was the highest pinnacle of religious holiness. Jericho on the other hand was considered a place of great depravity. Remember that Jericho was cursed by God and destroyed in the battle of conquest led by Joshua. Jesus came to earth to vanquish the same spirit of rebellion against God that Jericho represented.

On the way to Jericho the man of the story is accosted by robbers. He is stripped, beaten and left for dead. Sounds familiar doesn't it. Jesus in his last hours was similarly treated. He was stripped of his robe and his dignity. He was subjected to a trial of false accusations and summarily sent to the Roman's for execution. There the soldiers beat and mocked him, plaited his head with a crown of thorns and treated him shamefully. He was marched out of the city carrying his own execution instrument. He was nailed hand and feet to the device of torture and death and left to suffer in agony for the day. And just as the priest and Levite went by the robbery victim on the road, so also they watched from a distance as Jesus drew his last breaths on the cross of Calvary.

Jesus is the Good Samaritan. Even though the Priest and Levite refused to help the dying robbery victim, so a Samaritan (a foreign dog to the Jews) came to his aid. Jesus in his daily life on earth came to the aid of many of his peers. He tended the blind and restored their sight. He gave new strength to the limbs of the palsied and paralyzed. He gave hearing to the deaf. He restored the demon possessed to sanity. He healed the broken in spirit and those carrying huge burdens of guilt, by forgiving their sins with words of comfort from his heavenly throne.

The Samaritan tended the wounds of this broken man along the perilous road to Jericho and carried him to a nearby inn for hospitalization. He paid the price of his care and even extended credit to the innkeeper for future care. So Jesus has paid the price for our care and has forgiven the future debts of sin and shame that may accrue. Our lives are assured forgiveness and peace from now and forever for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He gave his all and renews our lives with his own life-giving blood. He is the Good Samaritan to us who are the victims of sin, death, the power of Satan and the wiles of the world all of which which rob us of our joy, peace and salvation and leave us bleeding to death on the road to destruction.

Now that we know and accept who the Good Samaritan really is -- Christ the Savior, we have been transformed and empowered to take his will and make it our own. In the power of the Spirit of Christ that dwells in our hearts we can and will without question reach out to those who are in subject to the pains of this world of sin and death. We seek to alleviate the physical and spiritual burdens of our whole fellow humanity. Not just by giving our wealth though that is also needed, but especially by befriending

and accepting them with love and concern for their fullness and wholeness of life. Christ has given himself as both the victim and the Good Samaritan who is strong to save. Help us Lord to give ourselves also even as you have given yourself to us. For in your name we have the power to be Good Samaritans like you. The next time we see a need let us be our neighbor's good samaritan by your strength.