

Transformation from the Inside-Out

In my last article I began looking at a portion of Jesus' teaching known as the parable of the Good Samaritan. This parable points to a kingdom ethic taught by Jesus, i.e., a way of life that flows from a heart that has been transformed by the gospel. Jesus begins this parable as a response to a very pointed question by a Jewish expert in the Law of Moses, "Who is my neighbor?" We looked at the first portion of this parable under the man-centered and works-centered belief that I called, "the folly of religious activity." What I sought to point out is that there are those who either refuse to help someone in need or they will often help for the wrong reasons. The scriptures give us a number of wrong reasons including a desire to be seen by others (Matthew 6:1) as well as a belief that one can earn favor with God by doing various external acts of obedience and service to others. This generally falls under the category of a "social gospel", i.e., a belief that I am right with God based on what I do, e.g., helping the poor, disenfranchised, etc.

In contrast to a "social gospel" is the true gospel of trusting in the perfect work of Christ alone for my salvation. Out of this genuine transformation from the inside out, by grace, flows a lifestyle of obedience based on a proper motivation of love for and thankfulness to God for our salvation. This brings us to the second aspect of this parable; "the wisdom of redeeming grace." If you remember our parable from last time, a man was stripped, beaten and robbed and left for dead. The following verses are from Luke 10:33-35: "But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'"

Anyone who reads this parable will see that the hero of the story is the Samaritan. The expert in the Law would have recognized this immediately. It's important to note that the first century Jewish people despised the Samaritans. Suffice it to say that Jesus' story of a Samaritan hero would have been, at least initially, offensive to this Jewish man. Robert Stein, in his book, "The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings" writes that this parable is, "no longer simply a beautiful example, but on the contrary, a cutting, biting, and anti-discriminatory attack against the Jewish hatred of the Samaritans." Jesus is clearly elevating this idea of mercy and sacrifice to a level that would have been extremely uncomfortable for this Jewish man. He is saying that you must truly love those whom God brings into your path even if they are your enemy!

What does this say to Christians today? Are we willing to reach out with the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ to anyone that he brings into our path, or are there particular people, or groups of people, that we avoid? Although we don't often use the word 'enemy' (Matthew 5:43-48), ours is a culture that experiences discrimination on a number of levels including racism and classism. Are there those of a different race or socio-economic class that

we avoid? Are we quick to label people as ‘welfare recipients’ or the like and determine for ourselves that they are unworthy of our mercy? Let’s not miss the full extent of this parable. Jesus is saying that we cannot discriminate against anyone for any reason!

In Jesus’ parable, the religious elite turned away from meeting the needs of the person who was beaten and robbed and it was only the Samaritan—the one despised by those religious leaders—who was willing to honor God by extending the hand of mercy to one in need. The question that we should ask ourselves is, “Do I really desire to show biblical mercy (mercy structured by scripture), as I am able, to anyone whom God brings into my life?” If the answer is ‘no’ then there is a question as to whether we have truly been transformed from the inside out by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.