

## Samaritan IV: The Samaritan

September 1, 2019

Luke 10:25-37

For the last three weeks, we've been talking about "The Good Samaritan" and how the different characters represent a problem with compassion. The Lawyer teaches us that there are people out there who are very hard to be compassionate towards. The Victim, a perfect representation of humanity, teaches us that we are not always the best at receiving compassion. The Priest and the Levite teach us that we are a distracted people. However, one question still remains. We'll assume you've taken to heart the messages of the last three sermons. You're showing love to yourself by allowing love to be shown to you from anyone that will offer it. Your heart is set on loving everyone indiscriminately and equally. You've set aside those distractions that have blinded you to the need of those around you. What if your compassion towards others is rejected, though? This is the issue the Samaritan risked running into.

First, let's start off with the question "What is a Samaritan?" Literally, it is someone who lived in the region of Samaria towards the northern end of modern-day Israel. They were a collection of people that were looked down upon by their fellow Jews because of their adherence to the Law. As I've mentioned in previous weeks, there were many people focused on the Law (lawyers/scribes, Levites, the priesthood, Pharisees, and other religious leaders). If you didn't follow the rules/Law, you were frowned upon. You were looked at as a heathen and an outcast. People thought you were unable to be saved, and therefore were cast aside. Well, the Samaritans were Jews, but they didn't follow all the rules in the Law. The Samaritans thought that Mt. Gerizim was the religious center, not Jerusalem. The Samaritans had different practices as to the cleanliness of vessels and contact with one another. The disagreement went both ways though.

The Samaritans really didn't like the Israelite Jews either. They claimed that the Israelite Jews distorted their copies of the Torah to minimize the importance of Mt. Gerizim. The Samaritans claimed *they* were in fact the proper descendants of Israel. Suffice it to say, this was very much an intense rivalry. This separation is what makes this story truly incredible.

The man on the side of the road has been beaten and two persons of the same culture as him pass him by. Enter the Samaritan stage left. The man on the side of the road would reject his help if he knew who was helping him. The Samaritan's culture would have easily made it easy for him to spit on/kick the man while he's down, but he doesn't. The Samaritan stops, helps the victimized man. The Samaritan takes many risks in this story. Firstly, he risks falling prey to the robbers that beat the other man because he is stopping on the road to help. Secondly, he risks his health by coming into contact with the wounds and bodily fluids of this strange, beaten man. Lastly, he risks a two-fold rejection, both from the Israelite because of who he is and from fellow Samaritans because of who he helps. Nonetheless, he takes risks, all for the wellness of someone he doesn't know and may never cross paths with again in life.

This is because the Samaritan is not distracted by the Law or cultural norms. He accepts the potential for rejection in doing what is right/humane. He genuinely cares for the well-being of this strange man, because he stands to gain nothing from doing this. In short, he embodies what "love" truly is.

That is our challenge as Children of God: to do as the “good Samaritan” does. We need to genuinely care for one another, even amidst standing to gain nothing from it. We need to willingly and knowingly cross lines/break rules for what is right, just, and expresses God’s love. We need to cross those lines, even at the risk of facing rejection. We need to set aside the distractions of one’s life for the needs of another’s life.

Now, I keep mentioning “rejection” like it’s a fly that can just be brushed off, but rejection is not something we take lightly. Rejection hurts. It can be upsetting. So, what do you do if your help is rejected? As hard as it might be, don’t despair. Keep in mind that love ceases to be love when it is forced. You offered it out of the goodness of your heart, and in love, you accept the rejection, knowing you have still done something right.

In all truth, you have already shown compassion. Compassion is simply the act of showing that you care. You can go on mission trips to say you did them, but if that love for those you help isn’t there, that’s not compassion; it’s self-fulfillment. Compassion is expressed simply in offering your help, in expressing a willingness to help a person bear the weight of their troubles, listen when they need to talk, to see them and not just yourself as real and able to hurt in this world. That is what makes the Good Samaritan “good.” It wasn’t that he bandaged the man’s wounds. It wasn’t that he put the man on his animal and walked. It wasn’t that he put the man up in an inn and paid his medical expenses. He was “good” because he went out of his way to do what others didn’t, he cared enough to offer the help in the first place, and he did these things out of love in its purest form. Compassion/being a neighbor is not succeeding in giving help; it is offering it in the first place. So, I ask you: How have you been a neighbor today?