

SERVE, LUKE 10:25-37

Life On Mission #3

◆Intro: [[The Oasis](#) It gets pretty crowded around the oasis this time of year. People from all over drinking this wonderful water. There is nothing like it in all the desert. But we had a funeral the other day. Abdul shared about this neighbor just a few hundred yards away who died of thirst. His description made cold chills run up my spine. It's tough to think about. That Abdul, he's great with words. He had a slide presentation and everything! We formed a club, "Desert Dwellers who have found the Living Water." We meet every week and several times during the week. We talk about how we came to the water and how we drink. Right now there's an argument as to whether water in well A or B is better. Some say one is purer, and others say the other is cooler. Doesn't make sense because they are 20 feet apart.

◆One time our club sent out a scout to rescue the thirsty. He did all right for a while, but carrying the delirious people to the Living Water became lonely and hard and thankless. When the old timers criticized his methods, he quit. Now, there are times when the water actually goes to waste. It's overflowing from the well, but because there aren't enough people to drink it, it just falls to the ground. Some people talk of forming new rescue parties and searching out those who are thirsty, but others say you have to have a certain gift for that kind of work.

◆We're having some excitement in our group. It seems that someone claims they have a new mint flavored oasis on the next dune ... we've lost some of our people to that well, I understand. Perhaps people want variety. Water has very little taste you know and it could be made more exotic

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without having any of its thirst quenching powers lost. In fact, sometimes I get a little board myself, drinking the same stuff day in and day out.

◆ Anyway that funeral yesterday got us all disturbed around here. Our neighbor died of thirst. It doesn't seem to make sense, he lived so close to the oasis. Night after night he must have heard our songs drifting across the sands, telling about the wonderful characteristics of water, yet he never came. But we did right by him. At his funeral we said good things. We didn't even mention that this poor guy had died of thirst. We even put the symbol of a water bucket on his tombstone. Makes his family feel better you know.]

◆ That's a powerful parable isn't it? Stories have a way of helping us see ourselves. We're on our second action step of Life On Mission today, and I hope that you feel your heart growing a few sizes as we look at the compassion of Jesus for messed-up people like us, and the world around us. We're spending these 40 days in our Life Group studies, our own time with God, and our weekend worship time to seek God's heart for the world since helping the lost become found is one thing we can't do in heaven.

◆ Week One we saw that God left us on earth to be witnesses to his love and goodness.

◆ Week two, our first action step, was the Connect step; making friends with people who need God in their lives and intersecting our lives with theirs.

◆ Today's step in Life on Mission is the choice to Serve: that is doing something that tangibly expresses the compassion of God to others. To get at it lets turn to one of Jesus' best known stories, the Good Samaritan.

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◆ Lets read it... (Luke 10:25-37)

◆ Perhaps the most obvious thing about Jesus' story is that it includes two important religious leaders who are trying very hard NOT to be helpful to a man in dire need, and one commoner who is unexpectedly helpful. What can we learn about serving the people we connect with from this?

◆ **1. When I genuinely serve another person, I am more concerned about being loving, than looking lovely.**

◆ A. Put it in other ways: a servant is more concerned with living out righteousness than he is about being right. God-followers serve other people not because they want to appear so heavenly, but because they care so much about the earth. Service stands against making people your project. When folks are your project, your aim is to get them to become something for your accomplishment (like making your church bigger, or putting notches on your belt of people you've influenced). Genuine service is opposite of that. Genuine service is giving away real love. Jesus' parable is asking us what our hearts are like.

◆ Now, on the one hand we don't want to be so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. But on the other hand, as CS Lewis has observed, it is usually those who think an awful lot about the ways of heaven that tend to make the most difference on the earth. He put it this way; **"If you read history, you'll find that the Christians who did most for the present world were those who thought the most of the next world."**

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- ◆ Lewis is saying that those who really care about the "inheritance of eternal life" that the law expert questioning Jesus talked about, will make the earth a different place, one that looks more like heaven.
- ◆ We see this idea in the negative reflection of the law expert in Luke 10. We know he's not really searching and struggling with the question of eternal life. Verse 25 makes it clear he just wants to stump Jesus with a hard question. He's a scholar. He wants to spar a little, have some theological wrestling, and show people that he's a pretty smart fellow. Jesus brings the whole discussion to a simple level that every Jew would know. "What does the law say?" The lawyer answers with what the Jews call the Great Shema.

- ◆ שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד
ואהבת את יהוה אלהיך בכל-לבבך ובכל-נפשך ובכל-מאריך
◆ *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."* Deuteronomy 6:4, 5, NIV.
- ◆ To this he adds Lev.19, love your neighbor as yourself. This was common Jewish summary of the law.

- ◆ Understand, everybody knows this in Israel. Little kids are taught to say it in bedtime prayers. Devout Jews say it when they get up at the alarm clock, and when they crawl under the covers at night! So when Jesus says this simple answer is the solution to the lawyers theological challenge, the lawyer doesn't look so impressive anymore. Furthermore, though it's simple, it's a mouthful too, for who can say that they love God with everything they have? More than they love their paycheck. More than they

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love golf. More than they love their favorite vacation spot. Who can say they give God more time than their favorite video game? I mean, if Jesus had said, “Keep the Ten Commandments” someone might say

◆“Well lets see. I haven’t murdered anyone. I haven’t told a lie today. I haven’t has sex with anyone beside my spouse today... That’s pretty good isn’t it?” There might be a little wiggle room for thinking you got in going on. But NOBODY can say, “Oh yeah, I’ve loved my neighbor as much as I’ve taken care of ME today.” That’s why in verse 29 it says the lawyer “wanted to justify himself” by saying, “Yeah, but, who really is my neighbor anyway?” The simple answers is really pretty hard to live out. And this fellow doesn’t really want to live it out, or to *be* righteous in his behavior. He wants to *look* like he’s right. He is content with knowing right things, without caring too much about doing them.

◆B. I wonder if any of us do that. O sure, we know God cares about the guy broken down on the side of the road. We’ll pray for him...maybe without slowing down. Jesus shows us in the parable that we can have great theological understanding and be lousy neighbors. We can have great Bible knowledge and love our children poorly. We can soak up classes on the Book of Revelation, and be pretty worthless to the city we live in. Churches can argue about who has a better understanding of water, and never give any away to thirsty people! Religious people can be really good at being right (made it to the worship service, check. Said a prayer. Check. Gave away a dollar at Walmart. Check. Fed the kids today. Check. Brought home the pay...Check.) It all looks good on the outside

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but have we had any real compassion anywhere? Did anyone feel loved by us?

◆ In the parable, the Priest and the Levite are people from the lawyer's class. All three of them are church leaders! All three of them are too preoccupied to actually love someone.

◆ 1) The Priest. He has to get to services. He's the one who offers sacrifices for the sins of the people. He probably has a sermon to deliver on helping people on the side of the road. Let's suppose there are 200 people in his church depending on him to show up at 9:30. Well that guy in the gutter will have to wait. And there were laws about that too. In fact, a priest couldn't come within 8 feet of a dead carcass. If you became contaminated by say, dragging a dead raccoon off the road, you'd have to spend 7 days and a whole series of ritual baths to become ceremonially pure again just so you could go back to work at the temple. This was suppose to teach Israel how holy and important God was, but we can guess it became a whole list of hassles the priest had to deal with. In a busy economy those rules could really slow you down!

◆ 2) What about the Levite. Levites were the temple grounds crew. They were holy men set apart to take care of the church building. Of all the tribes in Israel, only the Levites owned no territory in Israel. Their territory was the worship spaces. He too had to be pure. And he had important church duties to attend to. He hasn't got time for this, which points out something else about genuine service: genuine service costs us. A real servant heart is willing to take on mess and

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difficulty because of love. It's the effort in the difficulty that highlights the love involved!

◆Something else that we learn from the Good Samaritan...

◆2. Serving someone doesn't have to be complicated.

◆Jesus' point is that if we really love God we will love our neighbor. Love always does something to express itself. It's what James said about faith.

◆ *What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. **James 2:14-17***

◆ Real faith expresses itself in love.

◆ *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." Galatians 5:6, NIV.*

◆ *"serve one another in love." Galatians 5:13, NIV.*

◆This doesn't have to be hard. The Samaritan didn't quit his job and move to Jericho Dr. to set up a hospital. The Samaritan didn't sell his donkey and give all his money to the hurt man. He didn't even stop his business trip completely. The need was obvious: shelter and care. And he had tasks to attend to. So he shelled out 2 denari (two days wages, so at minimum wage that's about \$116). He helped with what he could, where he saw a need. Who is my neighbor? Anyone whose need I see is my neighbor and serving them is doing what I am equipped to in the moment.

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◆B. Whose needs do you see? Why does that boy get in trouble with the law? There is a need there. Do you see it? Why is that girl so quiet? Why is that kid alone on the playground?

◆A new school counselor was at recess for the first time and noticed a little girl all by herself. Most all the other kids were on the other end of the field playing soccer. “Are you lonely?” the counselor asked. “Not really.” came the reply. Well, this counselor was determined to care. “How about if I be your friend?” The little girl shrugged a little, and said, “Um...ok I guess.” The counselor pressed further. “Why are you all alone over here?” she asked. The little girl rolled her eyes a bit and let her arms flop against her sides as she said, “I’m the goalie.”

◆Ok, so the school counselor missed that, but her heart was in the right place, wasn’t it? She was looking for a need. And God’s people are like that.

◆*“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” 1 Peter 4:10, NIV.*

◆What do you have? What gifts? What abilities? What circumstances in life? You are on mission from God in your own place, with your own set of abilities and circumstances.

◆**Conclusion:** There’s another shocking thing in Jesus parable: the good guy in the white hat was a Samaritan. That might not mean much to us. But it meant a lot to the Jews. Samaritans were considered half-breed Jews; Jews who intermarried with pagans. Serious orthodox Jews wouldn’t

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even travel on Samaritan soil! They'd take a long way around. So Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan like saying "Along came a black share-cropper who saw a white, Nazi-supremacist, tattooed with hate-speech, and hurt on the side of the road... and he cared for him." Nothing but a heart of love could make this happen. And oddly enough, it's the Samaritan who is being like God. Not the priest. Not the church employee/Levite. The regular Joe. It's a mark of regular people who follow Jesus. The pagan Roman Emperor Hadrian said of Christians in first century - "See how they love one another. They never fail to help the widows - they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If they have something, they give freely to those who have nothing. If they see a stranger, they take him home - as though he were a brother." Go and do likewise, and bring Heaven to Earth.

Mike will come now to describe a tangible opportunity to serve....