

A Case Study of a Mugging: Luke 10:25 – 37

By Haddon Robinson

Speaker 1:

Torrey Memorial Bible Conference, January 1980. This message is by Dr. Haddon W. Robinson, President of Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary, Denver, Colorado. He has edited the Christian Medical Society Journal, published a large number of articles, and is a former professor of Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. Robinson is speaking on the subject: A Case Study of a Mugging.

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You'll notice, as the days go by, a certain kind of decay sets into these conferences. First day when Briscoe speaks, he gets a formal introduction. You're told what a magnificent man of God he is. He travels all over the world. Second day I get up, he says, "Fend for yourself." 18 and one. Not bad. I found out that the one you lost to Grand Canyon College. Boy, you could do better than that. I mean, if I were you, I would use the initials like GC of A at Grand Canyon College.

Down in our way, they say that the definition of an atheist is when Notre Dame plays Southern Methodist, you don't care who wins. And when Biola plays Westmont, I suspect that the mark of your spiritual life is that you care about which one that wins. But 18 and one, that's not bad. I understand you play Grand Canyon again, and the odds from the Christian bookmakers are seven

to one and you're a favor. But since it's a Southern Baptist school, Ryan will give you a better rides than that. If you want to bet on Grand Canyon.

I know that it's your week off, but let me begin by making noises like a professor. If I were to ask you what God requires of you and your relationship to him, I suspect that many of you might answer, in the words of Deuteronomy 6:5, that you shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart and soul and strength in mind. And of course, you'd be absolutely right. And if I were to ask you what God requires of you in your relationship to your neighbor, I suspect that you would answer even more rapidly. But your responsibility is to love him too.

And the New Testament would be in hearty agreement. Paul says that love is the fulfilling of the law, that the mark of the Spirit's work in your life is love. And when he wrote to the congregation in Rome, he told them that they were to owe no man anything except to love one another. But if I were to ask you the third question, do you love God? That might be a bit more difficult. I suspect that you would think about it and then say, yes, I do love God. And on the surface at least, there's little that I could do to prove you wrong.

Because in a way, your love for God is an intensely personal thing, something known to you and something known to him. But if I were to ask you the fourth question, do you love your neighbor? That could be the most difficult of all. You think about it and say, Well, I mean, that depends who is my neighbor? You mean the folks who live across the hall? Or how about some of the people who live on the other side of town? Why stop there? Why not taking all the people

who live in California? And why draw the line at the city limits or the state limit? Why not taking all the people who live in the United States?

No, you might say with a shrug of your shoulders, I'm not sure I can answer your question. I'm not sure who my neighbor is. It's interesting to me that essentially that same conversation comes to us out of the 10th chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke. In Luke 10, verse 25, we're told that a young lawyer came to question Jesus Christ. He was not much in earnest. In fact, he wanted to sharpen his intellect on the razor strap of argument and increase his reputation as a scholar at the expense of a dull Galilee and peasant.

And so he has his whole conversation mapped out in his notebook at home. He knows how he will begin and imagines how Jesus will answer and has thought through how he will reply. And it's not long before in his mind at least, he has Jesus and a kind of intellectual checkmate. He begins his conversation with one of the greatest questions that mankind has ever faced. Ten thousand philosophies lay strewn along its path. He begins by saying, "Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?"

I must say that I admire Jesus' restraint. He doesn't go for the jugular vein. He doesn't say to this man, "That's a rather stupid question. You want to know what you do to inherit eternal life? The reality is that if you are really talking about an inheritance, you do nothing to get it. An inheritance is something you get because someone else dies and you simply accept it." But Jesus restrained himself and simply said to this young theologian, "You know the Old Testament law, you're a lawyer. What do you think it teaches?" And I think this man was deeply disappointed.

Jesus replied, Here he had come hoping for theological dialogue, and Jesus was treating him like Ned in the First Reader.

Just about anybody who grew up in the midst of the people of God would know the answer to that question. And so he blurted out the reply, "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart and soul and strength and mind and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said, "That's a good answer. You do that and you'll live." Suddenly, this young man recognized that he had sprung his own trap. He was like a boy allowed to make up his own examination. And then he had proceeded to flunk it. He had no problem with that part about God.

After all, everybody in town knew how religious he was. It was that part about his neighbor that got under his skin. About that he was not quite so sure. And so he did in his day what you and I have done 100 times in hours, face to face, with a clear requirement of God. He asked for a definition of terms. The text says that seeking to justify himself, he asked, and who is my neighbor? We've done that, haven't we? Again and again we come to face what the Bible demands of us. And instead of responding in obedience, we try to get a discussion group started.

Because if we can discuss the thing long enough and in just the right way, instead of having to bend our lives to fit the Scriptures, we can twist the Scriptures in order to fit our lives. And that was the Spirit in which he asked his question. And Jesus responded to the question, who is my neighbor? Not by giving a long theological treatise on neighbor love, not even by telling him that there were three different Greek words for love.

Instead, he simply told them a story. It's one of those stories that lies like a booby trap on the pages of the New Testament. You pick it up and it looks almost like a child's toy. You have seen it so often, it is very familiar, but as you examine it, it has a way of exploding and tearing you apart. It's the story of the Good Samaritan. Let me read it to you so its details will be fresh in your mind. In verse 30, Jesus answered and said, A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who both stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance a certain priest was going down that way. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side, and in like manner a Levite. Also, when he came to the place and saw him pass by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion and came to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring on them oil and wine, and he set them on his own beast and brought him to an Inn and took care of him.

And on the morrow he took out two shillings and gave them to the host and said, "Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back again, will repay thee." Which of these three do you think proved neighbor unto him who fell among robbers? And he said, "He that showed mercy on him." Jesus said unto him, "Go, keep on doing likewise." In order to find the answer to the question, "who is my neighbor?" Jesus took this man out of his world, his world of theory and theology, and took him into another world, into a world that is known to ambulance drivers and to police sergeants and to people who work the emergency room in hospitals.

And it was in that world that Jesus found the answer to the question. Now, if you and I are going to answer the question, "who is my neighbor?" one thing is absolutely essential. And that is, as we study this story Jesus told, we must have the right point of view. With Helmet Thielicke, the noted German theologian, who said that in studying the parables of Jesus, the viewpoint is everything. And in order to illustrate what he meant, he told of a time when his son was just a babe in arms. And he held that baby up in front of a mirror. And the youngster moved, and the reflection moved.

The baby waved and the reflection waved. And then suddenly the child's face lit up and he recognized, there in the mirror, that's me. Every now and then that happens when you read the Bible. You pick it up and it looks like black print on a white page. It sounds like stories of the long ago and far away. But there do come times when, as you are reading this black print, it has a way of changing, and you discover to your astonishment that there on the page of the Scripture is a reflection of yourself.

The viewpoint is everything. So the question is, who is my neighbor? And as we look at the story, we have to have the right point of view. Well, what viewpoint can we take? Well, one possible viewpoint is the viewpoint of that man who had been mugged by robbers and left by the side of the road to die. Imagine if we were to walk up to him and say, "Pardon me, sir, we're taking a religious survey. And I wonder, from your perspective down there by the side of the road, who is your neighbor?" If a man could have given a reply, I suspect that his definition of neighbor would have been as wide as the world.

Just about anybody coming down the Jarrah Corral. Just about anybody willing to stop and lend a hand would qualify completely. That's the way it is. When you have been beaten up, you're driving down the highway and your car comes chugging to a halt and you pull over to the side and you do not have the tools and you do not have the skill to fix the car yourself. Just about anybody willing to stop, anybody willing to lend a hand, willing to get involved qualifies completely as a neighbor.

It's when the other fella's car has broken down and ours is doing all right, that we can sit behind the wheel and define neighbor with all of the skill of a shystle lawyer. Remember years ago when our son Tory was just knee-eye to a Texas grasshopper? We were coming home from Sunday school and I asked him what he had learned in Sunday school. He told me that he had learned the story of the Good Samaritan and then proceeded to give me a blow by blow description of all that had taken place when he was through.

I said, now, son, what does that story teach you? It was obvious that I had caught him off base, and he thought about it a moment and said, well, that story teaches that whenever I'm in trouble, you've got to help me. Well, that's not the total lesson, but at least it is the viewpoint of one of the characters in the story who could see his neighbor as being as wide as the world but on center stage. In this story, Jesus gives us a priest and a Levite. If that wounded traveler were compiling a list of candidates for neighbor, then the priest and the Levite would have been at the top of the list.

Tradition tells us that before those men left their home in the morning, they recited those two great verses, you shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart and soul and strength and mind and your neighbor as yourself. Who then would be better qualified to be a neighbor than the people who knew those two great verses. But Jesus tells us that when the priest came down the road that day, he saw the man and passed by on the other side.

It's hard to imagine somebody doing that, isn't it? It's hard to imagine that someone would pass by a man who had been beaten up lying in a pool of blood and not stopped to care for him.

Certainly it doesn't sound like our kind of folk that's the kind of people that are on the campus of Biola. Even in this section of the country, that sounds a lot more like the people who live back east, people who live in New York, like those people in Queens, New York, who looked out the window and saw a young woman being beaten to death didn't even reach over and pick up the phone to call the police.

Certainly not our crowd, not the folks we know. But if you think that, then the chances are that you don't have the right perspective. Because I am sure that that priest had some good sound reasons, or at least reasons that sounded good for doing what he did. Since he was a religious type, I suspect that they were religious reasons. Back in the Old Testament, for example, in Leviticus Chapter 22, we are told that if a priest touched a dead body, he became ceremonially defiled, and that meant that he had to go through all of the rights of cleansing in order to be able to work in the temple again.

So I can imagine this priest saying to himself, I'd like to stop, but it would be just my luck to pick that man up and he'd die in my arms. And then I'd have to go through all of the rights of cleansing and people would ask some embarrassing questions and I think it's the wisest thing for me to do, not to be involved. Now, to be honest, I do not know that he thought that way. But I do know that whether he thought that way or not, we sometimes do.

There has been in the Church of Jesus Christ a doctrine which is sometimes called a doctrine of separation. And the way we spin the logic of that is to say that as Christians, there are things we do not do. There are places that we do not go. There is language we do not use. And so we will be separate from that type of thing. But then in continuing the logic, we say that all around us there are people who go to those places and use that language and have that kind of lifestyle.

And in order for us to maintain our testimony, whatever that is, we cannot have much to do with people like that. And often, in the name of Holiness, we pass by the very people on our Jericho road who are in the need of our help. The second man down the road that day was a Levi. If the priest was like the pastor in the temple, then the Levite was like the assistant pastor. And the scripture tells us that he, too saw that man and he, too passed by on the other side. Again, I can't help but wonder what went through his head.

Perhaps he thought, well, like pastor, like assistant pastor. I mean, if the pastor doesn't have time to stop, I'm busier than he is. I don't have time to stop either. Or perhaps he thought, I'm on my way to Jerusalem. I got a group of people there waiting to listen to my lecture on neighbor love. And it would be a shame to keep them waiting. And what I'll do is I'll jot this man down on a

three by five card and I'll use him as an illustration. And I'll challenge the young people to start a Jericho Road missionary society and send them back here to protect people like this.

Again, I do not know that he thought that way, but I do know that whether he thought that way or not, we sometimes do. There is an arithmetic in the Church of Jesus Christ, which I think is spawned in the counting rooms of hell. And that's that arithmetic that's so interested in reaching the masses that it never really gets involved with reaching the man so interested in reaching a world for God that it never really concentrates on the people around you. It's the kind of arithmetic that sends people across oceans but never really gets across the street.

It's not arithmetic that's interested in numbers, but not interested in people. Third man down the road was a Samaritan. If the priest and the Levite were at the top of the list of candidates for neighbor, then the Samaritan was at the bottom of the list. Because the Samaritans and the Jews hated each other. It was a long, deep hatred. In fact, whenever Jew talked about the Samaritan, he simply called him a dog, and everybody knew exactly who was meant. Just as in some communities you can talk about people as Coons, you know who is meant. But Jesus said this.

Samaritan came and saw the man and got down on the side of that dirt road, poured in oil and wine and the wounds, and then bound them up and put the man on his beast and took him to the hotel and sat up with him through the night and paid the room rent and became surety for the rest. Jesus said to that theologian Tummy, of those three who proved to be neighbor to the man who was in need, and he not willing even to take the name Samaritan on his lips, said the one who showed mercy on him.

And in that story, Jesus answers the question, who is my neighbor? And the answer to the question is as simple as it is sublime. What Jesus is saying is that your neighbor is anyone whose need you see, whose need you are in a position to meet. It's as simple and as sublime as that my neighbor is anyone whose need I see. I am in a position to see, there are some things that Jesus excludes from the definition of neighbor that we often want to put in. Your neighbor may be somebody you do not know. There is no indication that the Samaritan and the Jew had ever met each other before, and one of the marks of the love of Jesus Christ and his people has been that concern.

In missions where folks have gone to other countries, to cultures they do not understand, to people who speak languages they do not know, but they have gone because they have seen a need that they were in a position to meet. Your neighbor may be unfriendly. The Jews and the Samaritans were bitter enemies. And your neighbor maybe somebody who slams the door on your face, who talks behind your back, with whom you have a personality conflict, your neighbor may be unlovely.

There's nothing particularly attractive about a man lying in a pool of blood on the side of a dirt road. And your neighbor may have a lifestyle you do not like, may have a closed style that you do not approve of. You may not find your neighbor to be attractive. Your neighbor may be unrewarding. There's no evidence that the Jew ever paid the Samaritan back for what he did. And there can come in the Church of Jesus Christ are reaching out to people not because of what we can do for them, but because of what they can do for us.

After all, if you build a big building, you need to get people to occupy the seats, and you need to get the people to help carry the budget. And if you're involved in a religious organization, you need people in order to help you with the statistics. There's a way of reaching out to people not because of what we can do for them, but because of what they can do for us. Jesus is saying that your neighbor is anyone whose need you see, whose need you're in a position to meet. He tells us, by implication, something of what it may cost to be a neighbor.

One thing it costs is time, a willingness to be involved yourself. My wife and I have enjoyed 25 wonderfully happy years of marriage. Twenty-five out of 29 isn't bad. But along the line we have had some times of conflict. Sometimes when we've had difficulty putting things together. And one of the times we have difficulty is when we go on trips. I think you men will understand what I mean when I say that when you get in a car, the object is to get there 600 miles a day. You get there or you stop. Gas stations, place to eat, but you got to get there.

My wife doesn't understand that. She likes to stop and read historical markers along the way. This man on the Jericho Road was not taking a Sunday afternoon joyride. The Jericho Road was one of the most dangerous roads of antiquity. And yet he stopped and he got involved. Quite frankly, that is, for me the most difficult thing to give. I'm glad to throw a check on the plate and have somebody else do it. But like you, I live hectic, hurried, harsh, busy life and time is at a premium.

What is more, it costs money to be involved. This man paid the room rent. He paid out two Daenerys, which meant that the one Daenerys was equal to one day's wage for a manual laborer. He paid the room rent and he became surety for the rest. He gave money. He got involved with a man that he did not know. A man who was unfriendly. A man who was unlovely. A man who was unrewarding simply because your neighbor is anyone whose need. You see, because it's quite obvious as you read this story that all three of these men saw the same thing.

In fact, it's as though Luke in writing it, underlines it. In verse 31, we read the priest was going down that way. And when he saw him pass by on the other side. And in like manner, Levite also when he came to the place and saw him pass by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed came to where he was, and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. All three of those men saw the same thing. They saw a traveler who had been beaten up by muggers left to die by the side of the road.

But then again, they really didn't see the same thing. One man may have seen a ceremonial defilement. Another man may have seen a story to tell in a sermon, but only one. The Samaritan saw that man as his neighbor. You see, there is something lurking beneath this story. And it's this. That what you are will determine what you see. It's a great principle of life, isn't it? You and I go to an art Museum and you know and appreciate art, and I do not. And you say to me, Robinson, you see that picture? That's art. I say, that's art. Same picture, just different people. What we are as a way of determining what we see.

I remember in my teens when I first became a Christian, I got waylaid into memorizing Bible verses. I memorized some of those nasty little verses over in first John, where John says, "If a man says he loves God and loves not his brother, he is a liar. Because if you do not love your brother whom you have seen, how can you love God whom you have not seen?" Quite frankly, when I memorized those verses, I thought they were pious nonsense. I saw absolutely no relationship between my loving God and my loving my neighbor or my brother. After all, there's no problem loving God. He's always kind, always good, always gracious, always working my side of the street.

My neighbor, my brother, that was something else. He turned the radio up loud and I was trying to study. He said nasty things about me behind my back. He was always getting in my way. Could not for the life of me understand why my love for him had anything at all to do with my love for God. What he discovered as the years passed, that John saw what I did not see, and that is that Christian love is not objective. Christian love is subjective. Christian love does not reside in the person out there being loved. It resides in the person here doing the love. And that my basic premise was wrong, that I do not by nature love God by nature.

The heart is a rebel by nature. The heart despises God. And the only way I am able to love God is that the love of God himself, through his Holy Spirit is shed abroad in my heart. And the point of the New Testament is that the same love that enables me to love God in heaven is the same love that enables me to love my brother and enables me to love my neighbor. So God's love is subjective and not objective. And that's what this lawyer did not understand. He came with his neat little questions. He wanted to define his neighbor more precisely. And Jesus is responding

and saying to him and to us, if you are going through nice, neat definitions of who your neighbor is in order to be able to exclude him out of your life, you have told me a lot of things.

You've told me, first of all, that you don't give a rip about your neighbor. And secondly, you've told me something about your relationship with God. And the fact that you're known for being pious in your community tells me little. But what you do in relationship to the people in your community tells me a great deal. What you are will determine whether or not you see your neighbor, whether or not you see his need. It's a principle of life. Remember that poem we learned when we were growing up?

How did it go? Pussycat, Pussycat, where have you been? Been to London to see the Queen. Pussycat, Pussycat, what saw you there? I saw a wee mouse sitting under her chair. Great literature. I think, of all of the cities in the world that I have ever visited. London is probably the greatest. There's the Tower of London with the blood of history soaking its bricks. There's the Westminster Abbey cradling its historic dead.

There's the Buckingham Palace and the changing of the guard, the residence of the Queen. There's a cat who's been there, but she's back home and she's showing her slides and everybody gathers around and says, Pussycat, did you get to the palace? He said, oh, yes, I got to the palace. Well, Pussycat, did you get inside? He said, oh, yes, I just walked right in. It didn't bother me at all. Well, Pussycat, did you get into the throne room? Oh, yes, I was in the throne room. Was the Queen there? Yes, the Queen was there. Pussycat, What'd she look like? How tall is she? How is she dressed? How does she wear her hair? Cat says, I didn't notice. You didn't notice?

Pussycat, what did you see in the throne room of the Queen? And she says, underneath the Queen's chair was one of the nicest little mice she would have ever wanted to see. Why? Because she had a pussycat heart. And when you've got the heart of a Pussycat, mice are infinitely more important than Queens. What you are determines what you see. That's the point Jesus is making. Your neighbor is anyone whose need you see, whose need you are in a position to meet. But whether or not you will really see those needs depends not in your eyesight, but upon your heart.

The mark of being a regenerate man or woman. It's shown by the way we relate to those around us who are hurting. Let me quit where I began. Do you love God? Great. I appreciate that. I'm glad to hear that testimony. Then the second question. Do you love your neighbor? Because it really is a kind of pious nonsense to talk about loving God, whom we have not seen, if we really do not love our neighbor, whom we do see. And your neighbor is anyone whose need you see, whose need you're in a position to meet.

Let's pray. Father, we believe that your man Paul was on target when he said that we did not need anyone to teach us to love because the Holy Spirit himself has taught us to do that. But all we needed was a word now and then to urge us to abound more and more. We ask you, Lord, that we shall take seriously what it means to be related to you. We ask that we may really see people in their needs.

Certainly, Lord, there are needs that we see that we can't meet. We're not qualified. We do not have the resources. But, Lord, there are those that we can meet. Grant that we shall be do it that

we shall do it that we should be that kind of person. We asked this for Jesus sake and for our own sake. And for the sake of those who have to live with us. Amen.