

THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL

SIX-WEEK QUEST

SERMON OUTLINE 5

UNCOVERING THE HOLE IN THE CHURCH

LUKE 10:25-37

INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

I'd like to share with you several statistics about the people who make up this planet:

- There are 6.4 billion people in the world.
- 1 in 7 does not have enough to eat.
- 1 in 6 does not have access to safe water.
- 1 in 6 does not have access to the most basic health care.
- 1 in 2 lives on less than \$2 a day.
- 26,000 children under the age of 5 die everyday.
- 93 million primary age children are not in school.
- 800 million (almost 3 times the population of the US) go hungry everyday.
- Every 7 seconds, a child under 5 dies from a hunger related cause.
- Children who are moderately underweight are 4 times more like to die of disease than well-nourished children.

Now I'd like to share with you about the church in America.

- The total income of American churchgoers is \$5.2 trillion. (That's more than \$5,000 billion.)
- American Christians, who make up about 5 percent of the Church worldwide, control about half of global Christian wealth.
- It would take just a little over 1 percent of the income of American Christians to lift the poorest 1 billion people out of extreme poverty.

INTENSIFY THE ISSUE

I want to ask a question that I think is a fair one. Does the American church have any responsibility to help the poor, the hungry, the sick, and the dying who are across the street? What about those people who are across the tracks? And what about those people across the sea?

What does God expect of us as the wealthiest church in all of history? How are we doing at helping those who are some of the poorest in all of history? Has the church abdicated its responsibility? Is there a hole in the church?

It really comes down to this question: Who is our neighbor, and what makes us a neighbor? Well, you probably know that there is a famous story in the Bible that asks and answers that very question. We call it "The Parable of the Good Samaritan." Let's take a fresh look at this story.

INSTRUCT WITH THE BIBLE

CONTEXT: Open your Bibles to Luke chapter 10. We are going to look at the context of this story.

Jesus encounters a person called an “expert in the Law.” The expert called Jesus “teacher,” but he was trying to give the teacher a test. This properly schooled lawyer was testing Jesus, the popular, but unofficial, lay teacher. He wanted to expose to the crowd that Jesus couldn’t handle a pretty tough theological question. Jesus didn’t fall for it though, and since He was the teacher, He gave the test back to the expert. Let’s read.

Read Luke 10:25-28

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

27 He answered: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

The lawyer asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. So, Jesus asks him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” In other words, Jesus says, you’re the expert, don’t you know the answer?

The lawyer answers: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Jesus says in effect, “You’re right. You get an A+ for that answer.” But Jesus doesn’t stop there. He says “Do this and you will live.” This man was an expert in knowing, but not in doing. Jesus is saying that it isn’t enough to know the right answer, you must do it.

Now let’s look at verse 29: “But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

The lawyer wants to defend himself by narrowly defining the word “neighbor.” To the lawyer, “love your neighbor” meant love those of your own race and religion. If the person doesn’t fit these qualifications, then they aren’t a neighbor. “What is your definition of ‘neighbor,’” he asks Jesus.

Let’s look at Jesus’ response – how he defines a neighbor.

1. A NEIGHBOR IS SOMEONE WHO HAS AWARENESS

In reply Jesus said:

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

*33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him
(vv. 30-33).*

I want you to notice the cast of characters. We have a group of robbers. We have a man who

gets robbed and beaten so badly that he is almost dead. Then we have the three main characters. The first character is a priest. The office of priest in Israel was of supreme importance and of high rank. They represented the people before God, and offered the various sacrifices prescribed in the law. The second character is a Levite. Levites weren't quite as honored as the priests, but they were still a privileged group in society, and responsible for the liturgy and protection of the Temple.

So far, Jesus has mentioned a priest and a Levite. Who would you expect to be mentioned next? The original hearers would have expected to hear that a Jew came down the road. But the third character is a big surprise. Jesus said a Samaritan came. It's like saying, there's Papa Bear, Mama Bear, and a skunk.

Samaritans were despised by Jews. First of all, Samaritans weren't full-blooded Jews. They were genealogical mutts – part Israelites, part other tribes. Secondly, though Samaritans believed in the Law, they worshipped at Mt. Gerizim rather than Jerusalem (John 4:20-22). They were considered to be half-breeds and heretics by the Jews. The racial and religious contempt between these two groups was intense and at times even violent.

By using a Samaritan as the hero, Jesus is pointing out that it doesn't matter what you call yourself. It's the same today. Lots of people call themselves Christians who aren't.

Now notice what all three men had in common. They all saw the man in need and they were all aware of his need.

The difference is in what they did. The two religious folks passed by him – in fact they even distanced themselves by walking on the other side of the street. By contrast, the Samaritan took pity on the man.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "The first question the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But ... the good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"

The Samaritan sees the wounded man, and he has sincere compassion for him.

2. A NEIGHBOR IS SOMEONE WHO HAS ACCESS

He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him (v. 34).

Look at the first four words of this verse; He went to him. He had access. The Samaritan didn't wait for someone else. He didn't just call 911 or phone the pastor to get involved. He got involved. He was moved with compassion toward action. He got in the ditch with the man. He got close and bandaged the man's wounds. He probably came out of the ditch looking dirty and bloody too.

He bandages up the man's wounds, perhaps using his own head-covering or by tearing strips from his garment. He also pours oil and wine on the wounds. Olive oil was used to keep the cut skin supple, and the wine was used to help clean the wound and to help keep it from getting infected.

The Samaritan took the time to stop, and then he slowed his own progress by putting the man on his donkey (he got off his donkey and got personally involved).

There wasn't an emergency room where the Samaritan could take the man. Instead, he took him to a motel and cared for the man himself that night.

3. A NEIGHBOR IS SOMEONE WHO HAS ABILITY

The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have' (v. 35).

If you read between the lines, it seems that the Samaritan was a merchant who regularly traveled this road and had stayed at this inn before. He gives the innkeeper money to take care of the man for a while. Then he promises the innkeeper, who apparently knows he can trust the Samaritan, that he will reimburse him for any additional costs when he returns from his trip.

The Samaritan made financial sacrifices to help the man in need. The two silver coins represented two days' wages. Even more, the Samaritan said that he would take care of any extra expenses too when he returned from his trip (and you know how expensive those little mini-bar items can be, -\$4.00 for a Coke!)

Margaret Thatcher once said, "No one would have remembered the Good Samaritan if he'd only had good intentions. He had money as well." Many times it may take money to help your neighbor in need. He had the ability to help.

IMAGINE THE RESULT

Now, let's look at the last part of this passage:

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Jesus not only answered the question of "who is my neighbor?" but he also asked "how are you as a neighbor?"

Now, here is the big idea for our day and time. To be a neighbor, you must have awareness, access, and ability. For the last 2,000, a neighbor was someone nearby. But now, for the first time in history, that answer has changed. Who is our neighbor now? The new answer to that question is "anyone in need around the world" (THIOG, p. 101).

We have awareness. News is constantly and instantly sent around the world through people uploading pictures and videos to Youtube.com and posting comments on outlets like Twitter.com. We cannot claim that we did not know our distant neighbor was in need. We see it. We can either ignore it, or we can be moved to compassion, but we can't say we didn't know.

We have access. In 2005, more than 150 million American passengers flew internationally. With today's travel technology, you can be in any populated area on this planet within 24 hours. We can't claim we couldn't reach our neighbor any more. We can get involved because we do have access.

We have ability. Today we can help with a multitude of community health issues, including malaria, polio, tuberculosis, pneumonia, HIV and AIDS, prenatal and postnatal care, nutrition, vitamin deficiencies, tropical disease, parasites, and the major childhood diseases. We have new technologies for developing safe water sources. We know how to vastly increase crop yields, allowing more people to be fed. We can't claim we don't have the ability to help.

Listen to these words by U2's front man, Bono. It is a challenge to our generation. And the church should be our front taking up this challenge:

"We can be the generation that no longer accepts that an accident of latitude determines whether a child lives or dies, but will we be that generation? Will we in the West realize our potential or will we sleep in the comfort of our affluence with apathy and indifference murmuring softly in our ears? Fifteen thousand people dying needlessly every day from AIDS, TB, and malaria. Mothers, fathers, teachers, farmers, nurses, mechanics, children. This is Africa's crisis. That it's not on the nightly news, that we do not treat this as an emergency- that's our crisis.

Future generations flipping through these pages will know whether we answered the key question. The evidence will be the world around them. History will be our judge, but what's written is up to us. We can't say our generation didn't know how to do it. We can't say our generation couldn't afford it. And we can't say our generation didn't have reason to do it. It's up to us" (THIOG, p. 105).

Here is the bottom line. "If we are aware of the suffering of our distant neighbors – and we are – if we have access to these neighbors, either personally or through aid organizations and charities – and we do – and if we have the

ability to make a difference through programs and technologies that work – which is also the case – then we should no more turn our backs on these neighbors of ours than the priest and Levite should have walked by the bleeding man" (THIOG, p. 104).

ILLUSTRATE THE APPLICATION

A church can't do everything. But doing nothing is not an option. As the wealthiest church in all of history, how are we doing to help those who are some of the poorest in all of history? What can the church do to help a neighbor in need across the street, across the tracks, or across the sea?

Pastor: The best way to illustrate an application here is to share what your church is doing – or planning to do – in your community and in the areas around the world you have been called to help. Show people the ways they can get involved.

