

Loving Others

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Preacher: Neil MacMillan

[0 : 00] Well, there's another story that I want to remind you of, and it's a story called The Three Little Pigs. So I don't know if anybody here has heard the story of The Three Little Pigs.

But it's a story of three little pigs that leave home, and when they leave home, their mum gives them a bit of advice, and she says to the three little pigs, she says, when you go out into the world, always try hard and do your very best.

And so the three little pigs go away, and each little pig builds a house for himself. And the first little pig... Does anybody know this story?

Anybody remember this story? Yeah? Okay, do you remember what the first little pig built his house of? Straw. So one little pig builds a house of straw, the second little pig builds a house of... sticks. Third little pig. Right, so okay, so there we've got the simple story of the three little pigs, and there are three houses, and you'd think, well, that's quite nice, I've all got a nice house to live in, but something goes wrong.

[1 : 18] Who comes along? A wolf, not any wolf, a big bad wolf. And he comes to the first little pig's house, and he says, little pig, little pig, let me in, or I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house down.

And of course the first little pig says, no, I won't let you in by the hair of my chinny, chin, chin. And so the wolf huffs, and he puffs, and he blows the house down, and then he goes to the house of straw to gobble up the little pig.

And then he goes to the second house built of sticks, and he says, little pig, little pig, let me in, or I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house down, and the little pig says, no, I won't let you in. And so he huffs, and he puffs, and he blows the house down.

And of course he goes in, and he eats the second little pig. And then he comes to the third house, it's built of brick, and he can't blow it down. He huffs, and he puffs, but the house stands strong, so he climbs up onto the roof, he's going to come down the chimney, and the little pig inside puts boiling water on the fire, and the wolf falls in.

So that's quite a good ending if you don't like wolves. And actually, lots of people who have written stories over the last few thousand years didn't like wolves.

[2 : 38] In fact, when we read lots of these stories, like Little Red Riding Hood, or The Boy Who Cried Wolf, or The Three Little Pigs, what we see is that wolf, or the wolf, or wolves, are often used as a kind of picture of evil.

Wolves are big and bad and wicked, and they're dangerous. And in the story, if there's a wolf, you know that the wolf is always the baddie.

Now here is Jesus telling a story, and in his story, there are goodies, and there is a baddie.

So we're going to think about the story for a little while and try and work out who are the goodies and who is the baddie. Now Jesus was telling this story to explain the commandment from the Old Testament, love your neighbour as yourself.

And it's really great. Some of the guys here are training to be ministers and to be preachers, and so it's good to see how Jesus takes the teaching of the Old Testament and tells a story to make it live for the people that he was speaking to.

[3 : 54] So here he is, he's speaking to these people, trying to explain about loving your neighbour. And he sets this scene in this story very well.

He says there's a man going from Jerusalem to Jericho. Well, everybody listening would know the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. It was a road that was mostly downhill, very quiet and lonely in places, and it was a 17-mile journey.

So everybody who's listening, they know the road he's talking about, and they can picture themselves walking along that road. And then we read that as this man is walking along the road down to Jericho, something terrible happens to him.

A gang of robbers get hold of him. And what do the robbers do? Well, Jesus tells us they rip off all his clothes and they strip him, so he's got no clothes on, and then they beat him up.

They give him a real hard beating. They take his money, perhaps, and whatever else he's got. And we're told in verse 30, they leave him lying there, bleeding at the side of the road, and he's half dead.

[5 : 14] He's dying. And so Jesus has told him a story, and he's taken to this point where the man seems like he's going to die very soon.

And that's a kind of tension point in this story, because then people are beginning to think, well, what's going to happen to the man? Is he going to live or is he going to die?

And so we read that as the man is lying there, he's dying, we're not sure what's going to happen to him. Suddenly a good guy appears on the scene.

And so we're told in verse 31, a priest is going down the same road. Now, if you were listening to the story back when Jesus told it for the first time, you would breathe a big sigh of relief at this point, and you would wipe your brow and you'd think, oh, good, a priest is coming.

And a priest is coming along the road to where the man is lying, bleeding and dying. Priests are good guys, and so this man is going to be rescued.

[6 : 18] And so every day in the audience, when they heard about the priest, they would cheer and they would say, yeah, great, the man's going to be okay because a priest is coming. And then they hear the priest comes along down the same road, he sees the man good, he's noticed him lying there.

Oh, but the priest passes by on the other side of the road. The audience are stunned, they can't believe it, a priest. He's just left him lying there.

If he was driving, we would say he'd put down the accelerator and he's sped off without looking into his rear view mirror. He's not interested. And people in the audience can't believe it was going to happen now.

The good guy's coming to the scene, but he's not done anything to help. And so Jesus goes on and says, and then a Levite is coming down the road. A Levite comes too, and they all cheer again.

They think, okay, good, the priest let him down. But now another good religious man is coming, a Levite. He'll help him, surely. So another cheer goes up for the Levite, yeah, he's a good guy.

[7 : 25] But guess what? The Levite scarpers as well. He sees the man, but he doesn't do anything to help the man. He runs off and just leaves him lying there in the dust.

Well, people are a bit shocked. A man dying on the road and a priest and a Levite have just passed by is a terrible story.

And then the story gets even worse. The wolf comes along next. The bad guy, and he's called a Samaritan.

And so we read in verse 33, and a Samaritan as he traveled came where the man was. Now, the people listening to this story, they thought Samaritans really were like wolves.

They really thought Samaritans were bad. They'd never heard of a good Samaritan. And so when they hear a Samaritan is coming, they want to put their fingers in their ears because they know something really nasty is going to happen next to the dying man.

[8 : 35] How bad can things get? He's left lying by the priest and the Levite, and now a Samaritan comes. He's really in danger. And so we read, the Samaritan comes where the man is, and then he sees the man.

Oh no, he's spotted him. What's it going to do to him, the Samaritan? And he goes over to him. And what happens? Well, it's the Samaritan who rescues him.

It's the Samaritan who saves him. The wolf turns out to be good, not bad. The villain of the story should be the Samaritan, but the villain of the story, the Samaritan, turns out to be the hero.

What does he do? Well, he goes over to the man and he patches him up and cleans him up, and then he's got a donkey with him, and he turns his donkey into an ambulance.

He maybe puts some flashing blue lights in the front of it, and a siren or rings the bell, and he puts the man in the donkey, and it's not the most comfortable ambulance, but they go down the road as quick as they can, because he wants to get him somewhere safe and somewhere where he can

rest and be looked after, and they come to an inn, and he takes him into the inn, and he spends all night sitting beside this dying man, looking after him, holding his hand, making sure he's okay, loving him.

[10:01] Isn't he a good Samaritan? And he really takes great care of him, and then in the morning he's got to go. And so he pays a couple of hundred pounds. He takes a lot of money.

We read two dinarai, I think, here, or two silver coins, but that's probably two days' wages that he pays, and says to the innkeeper, just look after this man, make sure he's okay, and so the Samaritan is so generous as well.

So the story of the good Samaritan is a story of goodies and baddies, and it's a story where the goodies turn out to be the baddies, they leave out in the priest, don't do anything to help, and the baddie, the Samaritan, turns out to be the good guy.

And that's the kind of story that appeals to us, because we often try and divide the world up into goodies and baddies, and of course, when we divide the world up into goodies and baddies, we're always the goodies, and other kinds of people are the baddies.

But Jesus is using this story to actually challenge us and to say, well, how good are you, really? And in particular, what kind of neighbour are you?

[11:20] Because this is not only a story about goodies and baddies, but it's a story about the kind of neighbour that God says we should be. And when we look at the Samaritan as an example of the kind of neighbour we should be, then we realise that we have to be compassionate.

That's one of the things that we read about the Samaritan in verse 33. It says, he took pity on the man when he saw him lying, dying on the road. He took pity on him.

He was a compassionate person, this Samaritan. And we also know that he was a generous man. Think about how much money he paid, how much of his time he gave up.

He was generous with his time and his money. And so to love our neighbour, we've got to be compassionate, we've got to be generous. And of course, between this Samaritan, naturally this Samaritan and the man who was lying on the road, they would see each other as kind of being at war with one another, enemies.

But this man knows how to love his enemies. And so to be a good neighbour means we need to be kind, we need to be compassionate, we need to be caring, we need to be gentle, we need to be generous, and we need to be able to love our enemies.

[12:48] But of course, when we say that, then we run up into a problem, don't we? Some of you are sitting there and saying, well, wait a minute, Neil, because we're more like the priest in the Levite, usually, aren't we, than the Samaritan?

We've got a real problem here, because when we think about loving our neighbour the way the Samaritan did, then we know that personally, a lot of the time, we're not loving our neighbour in anything like that way, and we know that the church fails to love in the way that it should as well. And so, you know, the story gives us a challenge. And it's the challenge of how do we learn as people to really be loving to others?

That's what the great command that Jesus is speaking about here is all about, love your neighbour as yourself. How do we learn to love our neighbour as ourselves? Well, the story is told to help us to understand just how that goes about.

So I'm going to run us through a number of things that are key to loving our neighbour. First of all, never forget compassion, and never forget to be compassionate.

[14:26] That's what we read, as I said, about the man he had real pity on the man lying beside the road. And one of the things that Christians are very good at is holding on to the right ideas.

So we're good at belief, especially if you come from my kind of stream of Christianity, which is known as Reformed Christianity. We're big on ideas, we're big on getting our theology right and correct.

But it's not enough just to have the right theology, is it? It's not enough to have the right ideas. Often we can have good ideas and not do anything about them.

So we can have a good idea about how we're going to really tidy the house this week. We've got a plan of how the house will be sparkling and immaculate by the end of the week. Or we've got a plan about how we're going to start budgeting well and saving money.

And we make lots of plans that often we fail to follow through on. And Christians are very good at having the right ideas and not falling through on them.

[15 : 39] In other words, the beliefs we hold about God and about one another often fail to make that short journey from head to heart.

And so we know we should be compassionate and we understand what compassion is. And yet somehow that truth never really is making the journey into our hearts.

And we don't know what it is to really pity and love people who are in need. And so if you're one of those Christians who has all the right doctrine but has not allowed that doctrine to grip their hearts and transform their hearts then you need to ask God to help you to take these ideas and make them a reality in your own heart to ask yourself am I really moved in my heart by what I see in God and what I see in the world around me?

Second thing, not only do we need to be compassionate, we need to be generous. And you see often Christians will love their neighbors a little and we love our neighbors a little bit because then we can feel good about ourselves and we can sort of crown our own self-righteousness.

What a fine Christian I am, do you know what I did for this person or the money I gave to charity? And we do a little bit because then we can hide behind that little bit and think we are good people.

[17 : 32] And what Jesus is asking for from us of course is much more than a little bit. He is asking for us to show a godly love that is generous, sacrificial and costly.

And that's much harder. And so you need to say, you know, is the little I do a way of just hiding from all that I don't do?

Is it a kind of token act of self-righteousness so that I don't have to face the reality that deep inside I am loveless and selfish?

So let's find compassion, let's be generous. Let's remember this, that our love must include our enemies. I don't know how many people you hate.

I don't know if that's a small number or a large number. Maybe you're going to tell me it's zero. But there are often people that we naturally dislike or hate.

[18 : 46] And people that we see as enemies or people that we feel bitter about because we feel they've harmed us personally and they've been spiteful towards us.

And we carry a real resentment against them. And yet this story is about loving even our enemies. We can't put a boundary around who we love. Jesus is saying whoever needs to be loved, whoever needs mercy, you've got to love them.

Even if they're your enemy, you've got to help them, even if they're your enemy. So one of the really lovely things that Jesus does in this story is he humanizes the Samaritan.

He makes the Samaritan into a real person instead of the bogeyman. Instead of the villain or the wolf.

[19 : 52] He shows the Samaritan as a person of flesh and blood and emotion and passion and love and care.

And nowhere has that done more maybe than in verse 33 because we read the Samaritan is traveling down the road. So everybody thinks, oh no, a Samaritan, one of the bad ones.

He comes and where the man is and they all stand back and think, oh, what's he going to do? What's the Samaritan going to do to this wounded person? And when he sees him, we read, he took pity on him.

And that word took pity on him. It's a really humanizing word in the Greek language. It says he was absolutely gutted when he saw the man.

It's a verb that speaks about emotion that kind of makes your guts churn.

[20 : 53] And that's how this man felt. He saw a bleeding man on the edge of the road and he was broken by that sight. It really moved him.

He was cut up, churned up, gutted. And so Jesus makes the Samaritan a real human being for his audience.

Our tendency, of course, is always to dehumanize people that we dislike, to forget that they are real, that they have emotions, that they have needs.

We dehumanize those who've hurt us and we dehumanize those who oppose us. And one of the problems we face as Christians is this. When we dehumanize those who are against us, we open up ourselves to the charge of hypocrisy and we know what Christians are supposed to do.

We're supposed to love our neighbor. And so when we seem spiteful to our neighbor or hateful or critical or judgmental, then rightly people hold us in contempt.

[22 : 07] Would we cross the road to show love to fundamentalist Muslims?

Or do we see them as inhuman, as the enemy? Would we cross the road to show mercy to some kind of atheist skeptic who pours scorn on our faith?

Are Christians crossing the road to show love and compassion to people in the gay community? Or do we keep all these people at arm's length and shout at them and dehumanize them and so betray the lack of love in our lives?

So our love must be compassionate, it must be generous, and it must include our enemies. And so what I want to say is that we need to allow what Jesus says here to humble us because the more I see of what the law demands, this law, to love my neighbor, the more I see of what that law demands, the more I know I cannot do what the law demands.

The more I know that in the face of the law I'm an utter failure. There are two great commands here, love God with your whole being and love your neighbor yourself and before both those commands the more I look into them the more I am shown how completely incapable I am of keeping them and how guilty I am of breaking them.

[24 : 09] And I need to then be humbled and despair of myself. There's a great holy God who has spoken truth and given us a way to live and we have abandoned it.

He is the Lord our God, that's who we're told to love, isn't it? The Lord your God. He's the Lord, the one who reigns on high, who is King of kings.

It's him we're to love, he's got glory and he's got majesty and what is he doing through this story?

He is taking aside the kind of pretense that we put over our lives, the veil of decency and respectability that we hide behind.

And that apart he's saying don't try and tell me you're a good respectable decent human being. I know you, I know your heart, I know that often it's not me who's on the throne of your heart but your own selfishness and pride and so he humbles us.

I had a teacher in Primary 3 of school, Broomhill Primary School in Crow Road in Glasgow. And I was in law of this teacher, her name was Mrs. Coyle and I looked up to her, literally, because I think to me as a three-year-old she seemed about six foot four, I don't know how tall she was, but she was massive, very tall slim woman so I was an offer for that reason, I was also an offer because during class she would listen to the radio, she wasn't just listening to radio music, she used to listen to motorsport on the radio during class time.

[26 : 04] How good was that? So why did she listen to motorsport? Well her brother was a guy called Andrew Cowan who was a famous British rally driver and then team of Mitsubishi sport in the UK.

Her brother's best friend was James Clark, famous Grand Prix racing driver and her husband was a guy called Brian Coyle who was also a well-known rally driver.

So she loved motorsport and whenever any of these guys were racing she listened to the races and the radio in the class so I loved this and loved her and looked up to her. Anyway, one day the bank beside our school was robbed, the Royal Bank of Scotland was robbed and thieves made off with £9,000 from the local bank just across the road from the school.

This was the talk of the playground, did you hear there were robbers at the bank? Well I know a good opportunity when I see one so I was telling all the kids in my class, yep it was all my dad's money that was stolen, all £9,000 belonged to my dad.

The robbers took my dad's money out of the bank. So they were all, oh wow, very impressed. So we get back into class and one of the little girls puts her teacher up and says, Mrs. Coyle, do you know that all the money in the bank belonged to Neil's dad?

[27 : 28] And Mrs. Coyle said, looking at me I don't think that's true. And in that moment I felt tiny because my lie had been exposed and Mrs. Coyle whom I held in awe was angry with me or disappointed with me and I just felt like a little crumb of nastiness.

Now, how are you supposed to feel in the sight of a holy God? When you see your sin, well you should feel even more humble than I felt before Mrs. Coyle that day.

Who are you? Your life is just a brain, just a speck in the universe. And you've turned in rebellion against God, you've broken His law and you've shaken your fist at Him and you've idolized yourself instead of Him.

And so we need to be humble before God. And what the Bible tells us is this, that God opposes the proud but He gives grace to the humble. So to be humble before God is a great thing because when you're on your knees before God and literally often when you're on your knees before God you're in a position to receive grace because you see how great your need is.

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. The Bible also says if we humble ourselves then He will lift us up. So what we need to do is to get on our knees before God and confess that we have failed.

[29 : 20] We need grace, we need the grace of forgiveness and we need another grace, we need grace to set us free from the captivity, the power, the slavery of sin because often of course we want to love our neighbour.

Often we want to be kind to our enemies but there's something inside us that stops us. What is it? It's the power of sin.

So when we feel the power of sin on us we think, oh man I'm going to have to try harder to love my neighbour. I'm going to have to try harder to be a good person and we try as hard as we possibly can and we realize it ain't getting any better.

Why not? Because I don't have the power to overcome the sin in my life and you don't have the power to overcome the sin in your life either. What do you need? You need the power of God to overcome the sin in your life.

You need the great living power of the Holy Spirit to come into your life and to transform you and so the good news here is that we worship a God of power, a God who is mighty to save, a God who transforms us when we are powerless to change ourselves.

[30 : 31] You know in the story of the three little pigs, well the focus is on what the three little pigs have to do. They have to build a good strong house for themselves.

It's a moralistic tale where the mother is saying to the three little pigs, this is what you need to do if you are going to do well in life.

Well listen, Christianity is not moralism and I'm not here to tell you what you need to do in order to do well in life or in order to be a good Christian because in the Gospel the focus is not on what we do but on what Christ does.

It's Christ who changes us. It's Christ who saves us. It's Christ who frees from the power of sin. It's Christ who enables us to yield our hearts to Christ as King.

It's Christ who enables us to offer up obedience as a sacrifice to God and in everything in the Christian life we rely 100% on Jesus Christ.

[31 : 40] And so the focus has to be in this story, not in what we do but on Jesus and what He has done. In this story we are reminded of the perfection of Jesus. What has Jesus done?

He loved His enemies. Christ died for us while we were still His enemies. Christ died for us, Paul tells us in Romans, while we were still sinners.

Christ kept the law perfectly and obediently in every aspect and that's why He was able to offer Himself in our place. That's why as His people we come under the clothing and the cloak of His righteousness and can be accepted by God.

The perfections of Christ are our hope. And the mercy of Christ is our hope. Christ is compassionate and merciful. We read this, there's a word at the end of verse 33 used of the Samaritan, the compassion He had, the way His guts were churned up.

And that word is used again and again in the New Testament of Jesus. He sees people who need healed, people who need rescued, people who need saved and He is broken for them.

[32 : 55] He weeps for them at times. And so He sees us in our need. And He is willing to cross the road to you this evening and to rescue you from your brokenness and to be your Savior.

The other thing about Jesus here is this, the story is a story about a villain, the Samaritan, who turns out to be the hero.

And of course that's the story of Jesus as well, isn't it? He's the villain. He's the one that people despised and rejected. He was a man of sorrows.

And he's the one that they eventually unjustly convict and crucify, executing them to death, executing them in the most barbaric way because they think He is the villain, the wolf who has come to destroy the religion that they followed.

And yet the one they think is the villain is the one who turns out to be the hero. Jesus breaks the power of death and rises in victory over evil and sin.

[34 : 18] And in the power of His resurrection life He offers salvation, forgiveness, hope and peace. And so what the Bible does is it points us to Christ and it says, look at Him.

Recognize your sin and your need but look at Him. He is able to save. Look at Him. He is able to save you.

Look at Him. He is compassionate towards you. No matter who you are or what you've done, He is compassionate and He is mercy.

Look at Him. He is our hero. He has conquered death. He has broken the power of sin.

He lives forever. He is the Savior. He is the Lord our God. And when we see what He's done for us in the cross, we worship Him.

[35 : 24] Our hearts are moved and lifted to praise His great name. And so those of us who know Jesus, we go with a great challenge to love our neighbor.

But much more than that, we go with great joy because we have a great Savior. And we know that He is able to transform us through the power of His grace.

And we go out as a worshiping people praising His name and delighting in our good Savior Jesus Christ. Let's pray and then we sing our last song.

Father in heaven, help us to hear the word of the gospel this evening. That Christ is our only hope, that Christ is the one who has risen from the grave and He is alive today.

He is here. He is real. He is with us. He is powerful. He changes people. He is changing us. Thank you for this great Savior.

[36 : 29] We bless you for Him. We lift up His name and we ask that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

And so answer that prayer in mighty ways. We pray and draw each of us to faith in Christ. We ask amen.