



TELL THE WORLD: IN THE COMMUNITY

May 9, 2015

Sermon:
What Kind of Neighbor Am I?

Introduction

We are created for the glory of the One who created us. Isaiah 43:7 says: “Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him.”¹ Now, the question is: How can we glorify the Creator? Ephesians 2:10 says: “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” This means we can glorify Him by good works.

It is true that we are not saved by good works but by His grace through faith. Good works, however are the fruits of the saving-faith. The evidence that we can give to the world that God is good who saved us is by doing good. It is because we cannot do anything good unless we are connected with Him who is good. When we acknowledge that we are saved, we can do no other than the will of Him who saved us. This is why 1 Corinthians 10:31 says: “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

If we let the people see and taste our good works in our service to them, we give glory to God. And the people who are served also glorify our Father in heaven. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

Ellen G. White says: “What is light? It is piety, goodness, truth, mercy, love; it is the revealing of the truth in the character and life. The gospel is dependent on the personal piety of its believers for its aggressive power, and God has made provision through the death of His beloved Son, that every soul may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. Every soul is to be a bright and shining light, showing forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. ‘We are laborers together with God.’ Yes, laborers; that means doing earnest service in the vineyard of the Lord.”²

“The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to ‘the principalities and powers in heavenly places,’ the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.”³ “The unselfish labor of Christians in the past should be to us an object lesson and an inspiration. The members of God’s church are to be zealous of good works, separating from worldly ambition and walking in the footsteps of Him who went about doing good.”⁴

Jesus’ Parable of the Good Samaritan

“A certain lawyer stood up and tested [Jesus], saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” (Luke 10:25).

Jesus had been a target of cross-examination by an expert in the law. Ellen G. White calls him as doctor of the law. A person who was trained and an experienced as far as asking question is concerned. That was part of his discipline as a lawyer. He asked a question not truly to know the answer. He knew it already. But as an authority of the law, he tested Jesus. He may have addressed Jesus as “Teacher” merely to be ironic. His purpose was to embarrass Jesus if He would not be able to answer the question. Jesus did not, however, enter into controversy. He answered the question in a form of another question.

Jesus “said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?’” (v. 26). The expert in the law was forced to answer his own question.

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

When he answered his own question, what did Jesus say? Jesus commended him, instead of giving any negative comment in spite of the fact that He knew the man’s intention. “‘You have answered rightly; do this and you will live’” (v. 28)

So, the expert in the law was not successful in his purpose of embarrassing Jesus. This is why he persisted with another question: “‘Who is my neighbor?’” (v. 29).

This time, Jesus’ answer was in a form of story.

“‘A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you’” (vv. 30-35).

After this, Jesus was the one who asked the question: “‘Which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?’” (v. 36).

Notice that in this lawyer’s reply, he did not mention the Samaritan. Jews had no doubt as to the heathen and the Samaritans. These were strangers and enemies. But he could not do otherwise than admit that the one who was the true neighbor was the one who performed the love in action, the one who showed sympathy and mercy.

When he answered, “‘He who showed mercy on him’” (v. 37), it indicates reluctance even to *name* the Samaritan.

Four kinds of people are represented in this parable:

● *The robbers.* What is the characteristic of a robber? He is the one who says: “What is mine is mine and what is yours is still mine.” He wants what others have. You might say that there are no robbers in our church. But if anyone does not return the faithful tithe and give the freewill offering, they are robbers (Mal. 3:8-10). While the Lord blesses us and entitles us to have the nine-tenths, if still we want to have the one-tenth for ourselves, we are robbers. Let us return the faithful tithe to the Lord. It is intended for His work.

● *The priest and the Levite.* What is the characteristic of the priest and the Levite? The priest and the Levite represent the one who says: “What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours” It means “mind your own business.” Is this happening in our church? If there is a program launched by Women’s Ministry and we do not support it because it is for women only, or if the elderly members have a program and we say, “That’s for the old folks and not for us,” then, we

have the same spirit and characteristic as the priest and the Levite. The program of every department is the program of the church, and we should be integrated. Therefore, if the Adventist Community Services department has a program of serving the community, let us all become involved. Let us support each other and never say: "What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours."

●*The innkeeper.* What is the characteristic of the innkeeper? He is the one who says: "What is mine is yours if you will pay me." It means that others cannot avail of anything he has if they cannot afford to pay him. Is this happening in our church? If we do not offer what we have without some kind of return or reward, then we have the characteristic of the innkeeper. Let us offer what we have especially in time of need and emergency. Let us make ourselves available when our neighbors need us without expecting anything in return. We too often forget that other blessings are given to us to help our humanity.

●*The good Samaritan.* The Good Samaritan is the one who says: "What is mine is yours when you need it." I hope this is happening in our church. We will always be confronted with situations in which we should offer what we have and make ourselves available to serve our neighbors who need us. Let us remember what the Good Samaritan did. When he saw that the man who fell into the hands of robbers was in need, he took pity on him, he administered first aid, used his vehicle to take the man to the nearest clinic, took care of him, paid the bill, and promised the man who would attend to the need of the patient that he would reimburse further expense. Jesus says: "Go and do likewise."

Serve!

Late one night in the 1960s, an elderly black woman was standing on the side of an Alabama highway enduring a lashing rain storm. Her car had broken down and she desperately needed a ride. Soaking wet, she flagged down the next car. A young white man stopped to help her, generally unheard of in the deep south at that time. The man took her to safety, helped her get assistance, and put her into a taxi cab. She seemed to be in a big hurry. She wrote down his address, thanked him, and drove away.

Seven days went by and a knock came on the man's door. To his surprise, a giant combination console color television and stereo record player was delivered to his home. A special note was attached. The note read:

Dear Mr. James:

Thank you so much for assisting me on the highway the other night. The rain drenched not only my clothes but my spirits. Then you came along. Because of you, I was able to make it to my dying husband's bedside just before he passed away. God bless you for helping me and unselfishly serving others.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Nat King Cole

The most important thing we can involve ourselves in is service. It is the unselfish service to our fellow humanity. It supersedes weather conditions, educational background, time commitments, financial state, political and religious preference, and especially skin color! There are three most important action words in the world:

1. Serve
2. Serve
3. Serve

Let us ask this question individually. Not, “Who is my neighbor?” But: “What kind of neighbor am I?”

The parable demands for of us than an emotional response. It should be an *intentional* response. What is the moral/spiritual lesson? Let us not be weary of doing good because it is the way of giving glory to God. Micah 6:8 says, “He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

Angels from the heavenly courts stand by all who do God’s service in ministering to their fellowmen. And you have the cooperation of Christ Himself. He is the Restorer, and as you work under His supervision, you will see great results. Everyone can say: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13).

We have neighbors and we are neighbors. From this parable, we understand what it means to be a neighbor. Our neighbors are the social outcast and the marginalized. They are those who are in need. They are all around us. The best and most honest question that we must ask is this; “What kind of neighbor am I?”

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¹ Unless noted otherwise, all scriptural references in this sermon are from the *New King James Version of the Bible*.

² *Christian Service*, p. 21.

³ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 109, 110.