

SAVED BY THE PERSON YOU DISDAIN!

Today's Text: Lk 10: 29- 37

Extracts:

But [a certain lawyer], wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” Then Jesus answered and said: “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 ... and set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him” [Lk 10: 29-34]

To treat with disdain is to look down on somebody or something, to regard them as not worthy of respect. Recently, some dams in Jigawa State in Nigeria burst their banks, setting off ravaging floods that rendered tens of thousands of people in a nearby community homeless.¹ Jigawa is located in the Muslim-dominated part of Northern Nigeria where Sharia law is enforced and adherents of other religions, notably Christians, are openly discriminated against through biased political appointments and persecution. But when floods ravaged that Muslim community, members of the JDPC, a Christian non-profit organization based in nearby Kano, were among the first relief workers there. In appreciation of that gesture, Abubakar Musa, a Muslim youth told a local newspaper that what the JDPC had done was unexpected but it was “a show of love and sincerity that came at the right time.”

It took Christians that the Muslims treated with disdain to come forward to save local Muslims from homelessness. In like manner, you may find yourself in a life (or status)-threatening situation and help may not come from expected quarters. In this week's study, a man was attacked by robbers that left him half-dead. Guess who showed up to save his life? There is an important lesson there for all of us. Let us find out!

¹ Based on John Akubo, “Just a brother's keeper,” *Dutse News-Metro*, http://www.ngrguardiannews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25914:just-a-brothers-keeper&catid=3:metro&Itemid=558 of Thurs., 14 October, 2010

1. Background: A Samaritan saves a Jew!

This is a continuation of last week's study, that is, the discussion between Jesus and a certain lawyer who had come to ask Him what He should do to gain eternal life. Prompted by a leading question from the Lord, the lawyer regurgitated what the Law of Moses had to say on the subject, namely to love God with all his body, heart, soul and strength, and his neighbour as himself. Jesus told him that he had answered correctly but that he should practise what he had said and live [Lk 10: 25-28]. That answer dealt a serious blow to the young lawyer's ego. So, wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" To answer him, Jesus used the Parable of the Good Samaritan [vv. 30-35], which forms the Bible text for this week's study.

It is a familiar story to you but I want to put a different spin on it. Put yourself in the place of the young wounded Jew helped by the Samaritan. Let us examine the story from that perspective, as follows:

a) *The young Jew was on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho*

The man was on a hopeful journey from Jerusalem to Jericho; hopeful in the sense that he expected to arrive there safely. Unfortunately, he fell among thieves "who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half-dead" [v. 30]. We are not told at what time of the day but robbers tend to operate mostly at night.

We are all on a journey of life with specific goals at different stages of it. For example, some of us are currently raising a family. Some of us are going to school. Some of us are trying to start a business or find the first job. Some of us are trying to begin a ministry. No matter where you are travelling to, it is not likely to be smooth sailing. There will be obstacles all around you because, your enemy, Satan, is lurking somewhere to steal, kill or destroy [Jn 10: 10]. Like a roaring lion, he is seeking whom he may devour [1 Pet. 5: 8]. Some of us have been left half-dead by frustration, failure, mounting debts or barrenness. Some of us have been victims of fraud, gossip and backbiting with little or no opportunity to retrieve your good name. Like the young Jew lying helpless on the road to Jericho, you are lying "half-dead" waiting for urgent help.

b) *His priest could not help him!*

By chance, a certain priest came down that road but when he saw the wounded young man, he simply "passed by on the other side" [Lk 10: 31]. Under the Law of Moses, priests (the descendants of Aaron) were not to defile themselves with the corpses of the dead among their people except for their relatives – mother, father, son, daughter, brother or unmarried virgin sister. As the ministers who came before God during worship on

behalf of the people, they were expected to be holy and undefiled [**Lev. 21: 1-6**]. So, by their law or religion, the priest that saw the wounded young man lying on the road had to pass by the other side so as not to defile himself! He did not as much as look whether the injured man could have been his relative. Law superseded sympathy.

We are not any different! For example, some of us are discouraged to help people in that young man's situation for fear of state authorities. How can you explain to the police that you are not responsible for the attack that injured the man? How can a doctor be sure that the young man was not hurt during a robbery attack? Can the doctor afford to treat him without police clearance? If you were to call your pastor, he would advise you to call 911 (or the emergency number in your country) or, at best, he would call the elders of his congregation to join him (on the phone!) in prayers for the young man lying half-dead on the street! If the injured man were a Catholic, his parish priest might, at best, want to come and administer the last sacrament (*Extreme Unction*) so that the man could make heaven should he die out of his wounds! In the end, the wounded man would be without any life-saving help from his temporal or spiritual leaders.

c) *It was not the responsibility of fellow workers to help him!*

The Levite did a little better than the priest. He “came and looked, and passed by on the other side” [**Lk 10: 32**]. The Levites were the descendants of Levi (Israel's third son) outside of the lineage of Aaron. Under the Law of Moses, they were to serve as spiritual assistants to the priests in tabernacle and temple duties [**Num. 3: 44-45**]. For example, when the sons of Aaron (Nadab and Abihu) were struck dead by God for offering profane fire during worship, it was Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Aaron's uncle (Uzziel) that took their bodies out of the tabernacle [**Lev. 10: 1-5**]. Therefore, it was not forbidden for the Levite in our story to come near and look more closely at the injured man. When he discovered that he was not one of them (priests or Levites), he let him lie! It was not his *duty or responsibility* to help him!

In like manner, many of us would do exactly the same thing. We may be of the same race or ethnic group but we do not know him. We may be both believers but he is not a member of our church. Even if he is a member of our church, it is not our responsibility because we are in the choir, not in the welfare committee. Even if he is in the choir, we are not quite close. ***When you do not want to help others, there will always be a justification for it!*** The bottom line is that the young man would still be lying down there- dying.

d) *It took a Samaritan that the Jews disdained!*

A certain Samaritan was also passing through that route. When he saw the injured man, “he had compassion.” He came down from his animal (donkey or whatever), bound up the wounds, set him on his animal and took him to a nearby inn where he himself would spend the night. The following day, he made a down payment of two denarii to the innkeeper on behalf of the wounded man, with a promise to pay what was left on his way back [Lk 10: 33-35].

Who are the Samaritans? After the children of Israel had been taken into captivity in Babylon, the king of Assyria brought non-Jews from Babylon and other places to occupy the cities of Samaria. At the beginning of their occupation, they did not fear God. So He sent lions among them which killed a good number of them. They then cried to the king of Assyria who sent them one of the Jewish priests in exile to dwell among the strangers in Samaria and teach them the rituals of the God of Israel. Over time, those strangers became known as the Samaritans. Even though they feared God, they served their own gods in accordance with the rituals that they had brought with them [2 Kgs 17: 24-29]. So, when the Jews ultimately returned from exile, they looked down on the Samaritans; they treated them with disdain. This is vividly captured in the encounter between Jesus and the woman from Samaria. When Jesus asked her to give Him water to drink, she replied, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? For *Jews have no dealings with Samaritans*” [Jn 4: 9]

It took a total stranger, a person disdained by the Jews, to show love to a needy member of the race that looked down on him and his own people. The helper did not see the colour or gender or religion of the wounded man. All he saw was *a man in need*. Love suffers long and is kind. Love does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things and endures all things [1 Cor. 13: 4-7]. *The dying young man was saved by the man that he disdained*. It could happen to you!

2. So where does your disdain of others come from?

From the forgoing, it is clear that the neighbour who will help you the day you need help may not be somebody that you know. S(he) may not be somebody you have helped in the past. S(he) could be your mortal enemy, somebody whose path you never thought you would ever cross again. That is why you cannot afford to continue with your current disdainful attitude toward others that manifests in one or a combination of the following ways:

a) *Superiority complex*

Without your knowing it, you may have a condescending attitude towards some people that you consider inferior to you by virtue of the colour of their

skin or ethnic/racial membership, gender, education, social status or material wealth. That is called superiority complex that makes you feel that you are “too big” to help those below you. The danger of superiority complex is that you are overrating your strengths without even evaluating your weaknesses, not to talk of giving due credit to the strengths of those you disdain.

When you find yourself in such a situation, do like David when he went in search of his family after the Amalekites had stormed and destroyed his camp at Ziklag in his absence. When he prayed, God assured him that he would recover all but did not tell him how to go about it. David went with his men. On the way, they brought him an Egyptian who was dying. An average leader of David’s calibre would not have had time for such a trivial encounter. David gave the Egyptian bread and water and revived him. It was through that man, an abandoned servant of the invading Amalekites, that David obtained the information that helped him to locate and defeat them. He recovered all, as God had promised him [**1 Sam. 30: 1-18**]. By helping a disdained person, God saved David’s family. Go and do likewise!

b) *Envy*

Some people have not hurt or offended us; yet, all we *always* wish for them is bad news or bad luck. We rejoice when they fall and feel bad when they succeed. That is envy at work and the word of God calls envy ‘rottenness to the bones’ [**Prov. 14: 30**]. For example, even though Haman was next in rank to King Ahasuerus, the husband of Esther, he envied her uncle, Mordecai, who was a mere gatekeeper in the palace because he did not bow down to worship him. In his own words, “all this [high post] avails me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate” [**Esth. 5: 13**]. In the end, his envy consumed him. He was hanged in the gallows that he had prepared for the man that he disdained [**Esth. 7: 10**].

Always remember that you can only be envious of those who are superior to you! Saul envied David [**1 Sam. 18:9**] and the Jewish leaders envied Jesus [**Matt. 27: 18**]. When you find yourself suffering from a bout of envy, just thank God for those you envy and ask Him to bless you as He has blessed them. It may be such people that God will use to save you out of your predicament. Was it not Joseph that God used to save his envious brothers from famine [**Gen. 37: 4; 42: 6**]?

c) *Crass ignorance!*

Sometimes, we disdain others simply out of crass ignorance. We do not know who they are but simply assume that they are not superior to us. We simply reduce them to our level and treat them like trash. Then, one day, the wrong we have done will dawn on us. If we are lucky, we may have room to apologize and be restored. Otherwise, can you imagine the trauma when you

come to know that the one who has the answer to your situation is the one you have disdained all this while? For example, Saul persecuted the followers of Christ with great zeal because he thought that he was fighting for God. Then, on his way to Damascus, to continue with the persecution of the church, Jesus struck him down blind and introduced Himself [**Acts 9: 1- 7**]! Writing about his misconduct later, Saul (now Paul) said, “Although I was *formerly* a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man, but I *obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*’ [**1 Tim. 1: 13**].

Be careful how you underrate others. That you are in front of them today does not mean that you are ahead of them forever! You need humility to love others as or more than yourself; to appreciate that you need others more than they need you. We all are in need of one thing or the other. For example, King Saul had all the political power but he had to invite the shepherd boy, David, to play music to send him to sleep [**1 Sam. 16: 23**]. Therefore, you can never be self-sufficient. You will need others, especially those that you currently underrate or disrespect.

3. Conclusion: It took Christ the disdained to save you!

In the Garden of Eden, Satan robbed us of our divine birthright, leaving us half-dead (i.e., spiritually separated from God). The priests and prophets of old came and passed us by because their religion and rituals could not permanently wash away our sins. Then, God sent His only begotten Son in human form as Jesus to die in our place. Although He was a member of the favoured race, they did not treat Him as such but as a blasphemer. As He was dying on the cross for an offence He did not commit, the people that He came to save mocked and derided Him. In response, He said, “Father, forgive them for they *know not what they do*” [**Lk 23: 33-35**]. *They disdained Him out of crass ignorance*. Most people still do. However, He has forgiven you as He did to His mockers in the past.

Like the Good Samaritan, Jesus has prepaid for your salvation with His blood. He has left you in the hands of an innkeeper (the church) while He is building a mansion for you in His Father’s house in heaven. He has been physically away for two thousand years. He will soon return to take you home with Him so that you can be with Him forever [**Jn 14: 2-3**]. The ball is now in your court. But, if you refuse to *truly* accept Him as your Lord and Saviour, you have joined those who still disdain Him. Can you afford to continue to treat your closest Neighbour that way?

You can only be saved by the One the world still disdains. His name is Jesus.