

KINGDOM OF REVOLUTION

Series: Stories Jesus Told

September 6, 2015

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Jesus, Parables, Kingdom of God, Good Samaritan

Luke 10:35-37, Matthew 21:28-32

Last weekend, there was a big religious rally in Eldoret. Maybe you heard about it. A big time religious celebrity guy was there. It was on TV and all that. One of the biggest events of the year.

And then on Tuesday, after it was all over, everybody, including the religious celebrity travelled back home. And, you know the drill, to get back to Nairobi from almost anywhere in this country, you have to come right through Nakuru - right through the Nakumatt roundabout.

And so, Monday afternoon, all these people were crowding through the Nakumatt roundabout. And because of the large crowd and the chaos, some bad things happened. A couple of people were robbed. A few were beaten. One guy was beaten so badly that he was nearly killed. He was robbed and beaten and just left on the side of the street to die - right there in the Nakumatt roundabout.

An hour or so later, the big time religious celebrity guy came through with his giant entourage - dozens of cars and body guards and all that. And when they came through, the religious celebrity saw this guy lying in the street, bloody and nearly dead. He saw him. And then he looked away and told his driver to move on. After all, you can't help everybody.

Further back, at the end of the long caravan of cars coming from Eldoret was a local pastor. He too saw the guy, and for a minute, thought about helping him. But then if *he* helped him, while none of the religious celebrity's entourage helped him, that might be seen as a critique of this famous guy, so never mind, he just kept on driving. Leave well-enough alone.

Then, a while later, after all the big shot guys were gone, the caravan of vehicles had gone through, and the crowds had dispersed, another guy came along - a Somali, an active member of "The Movement of Striving Youth", more commonly known as Al Shabaab. He was a jihadist. He was a terrorist. And this Somali guy came along and noticed this half-dead guy on the side of the street.

It wasn't the first half-dead guy he had seen and it wouldn't be the last, but for some reason, he felt compelled to help this guy. He took off his qalansuwa (his turbin-cap), and used it to make a bandage for the man's wounds. He soaked the cloth in his best olive oil, which is

believed to be a prophetic healing salve. Then he picked up the man, in the middle of the roundabout, and put his bloody, dirty, half-dead body into his car.

He drove up to PGH hospital and paid for the guy to receive care and stayed with him the rest of the day. The next morning, he spoke with one of the staff at the hospital and left some additional money for the care of this stranger. In fact, he gave them his contact info and told them he would be happy to pay the bill for whatever additional treatment was needed.

Now, which guy was of most benefit to this individual? Which did what was right in the eyes of God? The religious celebrity, the local pastor, or the Somali terrorist?

The answer is obvious, but it's a bit troubling, isn't it? The jihadist is not supposed to be the hero of the story! The terrorist isn't supposed to be the good guy.

This is the kind of story Jesus often told - stories with a twist, with a difficulty - stories that challenged people's perceptions. Stories that disrupted stereotypes. Stories that insisted on - that required - grace. Stories that cried out for change.

This morning, as we conclude our series called *Stories Jesus Told*, we're going to look at a few of Jesus' stories that pointed toward something much more significant than just a slight shift in religious dogma. What they revealed was a *Kingdom of Revolution*.

Let me pray that God will open our eyes, ears, and hearts to what he has for us this morning.

Prayer

Those of you who have read the bible or who have been around church much probably recognized somewhere in the middle of my story that it wasn't a true story. It wasn't an account of something that happened this week in Nakuru. Instead, it was a variation on a story that Jesus told - a story that we sometimes call the story of the Good Samaritan.

It's found in the book of Luke, chapter 10. The book of Luke is one of four accounts of Jesus' life in the bible, and Luke records Jesus telling this story in answer to an interesting question. If you've been here the past few weeks, you know that Jesus liked to do this - to answer a question with a confusing story. It was one of his little quirks.

And so, in Luke chapter 10, starting in verse 25, we find a short interchange between Jesus and a religious lawyer. It goes like this:

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

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

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.’”

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

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii 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.’

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

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Luke 10:25-37

So this guy asks Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus doesn’t actually answer the guy. The lawyer asks him what he needs to do to inherit eternal life and Jesus says, “What do you think?” In other words, “You’re an expert in the law! You should know the answer to this!” And so the guy answers him with what was a common answer in those days. 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.

But then, he goes a step too far. Luke says that he wanted to justify himself. In other words, he wanted Jesus and everyone else to know that he had done everything right - he had done what he needed to do to get this great reward from God. And so he asked the question that he would come to regret. He asked, “And who is my neighbor?”

Now, understand, he’s not asking, “Who is my neighbor - who am I allowed to love?” You know, like, “Show me my neighbor so I can shower him with love!” No, he’s asking, “Who do I *have to* love?” Perhaps more to the point, “Who can I get away with *not* loving.” That’s the real question, isn’t it? What’s the least I can do? It’s kind of like, “Who do I have to invite to my wedding?”

And so he asks, “Who is my neighbor?” and Jesus answers, “There was a man walking down the road...” Oh boy. You know, whenever Jesus starts telling a story, you’re probably in trouble. It’s probably not going to work out well for you in the end.

You see, Jesus did this a lot. He told these kinds of stories. And very often there was something a little off about Jesus' stories - often something scandalous. Pastor and author Jonathan Martin says that:

“The grace Jesus presents always comes through the vehicle of scandal.”

Jesus liked to tell scandalous stories. I talked several weeks ago about Jesus' story of a disgraced son and a loving father - a father who went against every accepted tradition in order to receive his son back into his home.

Jesus told other stories like this. In the book of Matthew, chapter 21, Jesus says:

“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

“‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

“Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

“Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

Matthew 21:28-31

Again, a son who disrespects his father is the hero of the story - a son who says he won't go to work - who basically spits in his father's face - that son is the one who is held up as the more virtuous. And then, as if to rub it in their faces, Jesus tells his very respectable listeners - religious leaders who always know the right thing to say - he says that the scoundrels - the corrupt officials and the women who sell sex - will enter the Kingdom of God ahead of them.

Make no mistake, Jesus was calling for a revolution. Throughout his life, Jesus bucked against the power systems of the temple. The reason the religious leaders didn't like him wasn't because he was introducing new theology that they didn't agree with. It was because he was a threat to their power. He was stirring up revolution - but in a way that they knew would be difficult to defeat.

A military coup would be easy to overcome. The Jewish leaders had the backing of the Roman army against any insurrection. They had quashed rebellion before and they could do it again.

But Jesus was encouraging a different type of revolution. It was a revolution of love, a revolution of grace, a revolution of acceptance, a revolution of second chances. It was a

revolution that insisted that more important than money or status or religious rituals or ethnic identity; more important than adherence to customs and rules; more important than being from the right place or hanging out with the right people; more important than *anything* else was this one thing: character.

What you *do* day to day in your normal life, Jesus said, is more important than what you *look like* or what you *say*. Allowing God to direct your life is actually more important than even the words that come out of your mouth.

When I was growing up, I heard a lot about how we shouldn't take the Lord's name in vain. It was explained to me that I shouldn't say "God!" or "Oh my God!" as an exclamation. It was a cheapening of God's name. It was taking the Lord's name in vain and that was a sin.

And sure. Probably not the best.

But you know what's worse than *saying* God's name in vain? *Doing* things in the name of God that he wouldn't want his name attached to.

In the history of humanity, people have killed, raped, stolen, tortured, dehumanized others, ostracized others, destroyed property, ripped apart families, denied basic human rights to others, and a long long list of other atrocities - all in the name of Jesus, in the name of God.

And they still do it today. Your friends do it. My friends do it. Sometimes you and I even do it. Jesus, in his Kingdom of Revolution says, "No more."

No one is good, says Jesus, except God himself. What, then, does that make you and me? Well, with any luck, it makes us like the tax collectors and prostitutes - the ones at the front of the line to get into God's Kingdom.

When Jesus told the story of the Samaritan, the man he told it to, this "teacher of the law" was not just some random guy, and he was certainly not a tax collector or prostitute. He was most likely a Pharisee - one of the two main groups of religious leaders. The other group was the Sadducees. And there were some significant differences between these two groups.

One big differences had to do with something that you and I may not realize was a problem back in the first century. It's a problem we think is new to us. And that is this: when we read the bible, we understand the difficulty of trying to apply to our modern lives words that were written thousands of years ago in a different culture. And we think that's a new problem. But it's not. The people living in Jesus' day had the same problem.

You see, by the time we got to the 1st Century of the Common Era, the law of Moses - the earliest books of what we now call the bible - those books were thousands of years old.

They were written about a completely different culture. And so, the religious leaders of the day struggled to apply those ancient texts to their modern life...just like we sometimes do.

And the way they handled this task was a source of much contention between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Sadducees looked at the question of how to apply those ancient scriptures and basically said, "You can't." By and large, the Sadducees believed, those ancient writings have no relevance for today. There were a few things they could take away - the ancient tabernacle, which was a lot like the current temple, the sacrifices, Sabbath, and the festivals. Those they could do. The rest of it, not really. So, you live your life 6 days a week, you do what you have to do, then on Sabbath, you come to the temple and do your religious stuff. That was how the Sadducees thought about the things of God and humans.

The Pharisees bristled at that notion. Sure, they recognized that the ancient texts didn't directly address many aspects of their lives, but they insisted that there were principles that could be drawn from those texts and then applied to modern life. That's why they ended up with so many rules. The Pharisees were these really dogmatic, legalistic guys with lots of rules and laws, but the reason they had all those rules and laws is because every time a new situation would come up that hadn't been addressed before, they would scour the scriptures looking for principles that could be applied to this situation. Then they would formalize their findings into a law - in some ways, the same process by which laws are made today. A situation arises, legal experts try to address the situation within current law. Then, if they don't think current law adequately addresses that situation, they set out to write a new law to clarify things.

And that's what the Pharisees did. They sought to apply the ancient law to modern, every day life. Meanwhile, the Sadducees said, "You know what, let religion be religion and law be law. Come to the temple, make your sacrifices, observe Sabbath, then go live your life."

So you can see why these two groups might have found themselves at odds. They were like two political parties with polar opposite views. They came up against each other regularly - although they were able to find a common enemy and scapegoat in Jesus. And all that background is important to understand as we watch this story unfold.

Because that's who this guy is - a Pharisee. And so it makes sense that he would ask this kind of question. Part of his role as a Pharisee - as a teacher of the law - was to parse out the specifics. If we're supposed to love our neighbor, he thinks, then we need to define *neighbor*.

Jesus says, "This guy was walking down the road, he was robbed and beaten and left for dead."

Now, the Pharisee at this point has to be thinking, “Oh no. Where is this headed?” And in his mind, he’s probably thinking, “Oh, I know. Jesus is going to say, ‘Here’s this guy in need, injured, without anything. You need to help that guy. He’s your neighbor. If you do that, then God will bless you’” OK. So that’s probably where this story is going.

He keeps listening.

Then Jesus says, “A priest happened to be going down the same road.” OK, this is the wrong guy. You see, the priests weren’t Pharisees. Remember: Temple, sacrifice, Sabbath - Sadducee.

If a Pharisee was supposed to be the hero of this story, something has gone horribly wrong. If the priest comes to this guy’s aid, then Jesus will probably look at the Pharisee and say, “See, if even one of those heretical Sadducees who have abandoned the law can come to this guy’s aid, why can’t you, a good Pharisee, do the same?” That’s what this guy was probably thinking.

But while he’s panicking about the thought of the priest - the Sadducee - being the hero of the story, something happens. Jesus says that the priest passed by on the other side of the street.

Whew!

The Pharisee’s thinking, “Yeah, that’s right. Those uppity Sadducees would never help anybody.”

So, at this point, the hero should come along right? And for this guy, he’s got to be thinking, “OK, here comes the Pharisee. Here comes the teacher of the law to the rescue.”

And Jesus says, “Then came a Levite.” Levites are like lesser priests - like sub-priests. Also Sadducees. Really? Is *this* Sadducee going to be the hero. The Pharisee has to be sweating by this point.

But then, maybe it’s not about Pharisee and Sadducee. Maybe it’s about status. Like, the high status priest wouldn’t help this guy, but the lowly minion Levite would. Jesus liked to talk about humility and all that stuff. Maybe that’s what he was getting at here. The big wig religious celebrity from that big church I don’t like didn’t help, but the little guy comes along and helps. Maybe that’s the point here.

But no, Jesus said the Levite passed by on the other side of the road, too.

Whew again!

OK, now that those pesky Sadducees - the high and mighty and the lowly alike - are out of the way - now that they've shown their true colors and not helped the man in need, *now* the heroic Pharisee - *me* - now *I* can come to the rescue. The obvious conclusion to this story is that a Pharisee comes down the road and helps the guy.

But that's not what happens is it? Who's the next guy down the road? Pharisee or Sadducee? Protestant or Catholic? Kikuyu or Luo? No, it's like a dude from Pakistan. It's like a Somali jihadist. It's a Samaritan.

Not only were Samaritans hated by the Jews, they just didn't belong in Jewish stories. They weren't worthy of Jewish stories. There was a saying at the time that "He who eats the bread of the Samaritan is like the one who eats the flesh of swine," which was pretty nasty and detestable to Jews. Samaritans were seen as something less than human - a tribe from the north that had a different religion and different culture.

Not too long before Jesus told this story, a group of Samaritans had broken into the temple and vandalized it, scattering bones all over it. They were terrorists. Not worthy of being included in this story.

But Jesus includes them. In fact, he does *more* than that. While this guy's head is spinning at the inclusion of a Samaritan in this otherwise Jewish story, Jesus is talking about how this terrorist guy was helping the man in need, bandaging his wounds, taking him to the inn to be cared for - and *paying for it all*.

And then Jesus, after telling this odd story, asks an oddly phrased question. Remember the guy had asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus asks, "Who was a neighbor to this man in need?" The guy was asking, "Who shall I love in my abundance of knowledge, religious piety, and riches?" But Jesus asks a different question. He says, "Who acted like a neighbor here?"

And the guy is so stunned he can't even come up with a clever answer - one that would make the Pharisee the hero. He just says, "The one who had mercy on him." The one - he doesn't say "the Samaritan" - the *one*, the *guy* who had mercy on him. The guy who helped him.

The lingering question though, in the mind of the Pharisee, is, "What about the blessing?" For a Pharisee, interaction with God was a transactional thing. I do this and God will bless me. So, if I help a dying guy (even if I'm a filthy Samaritan) then there should be some blessing here, right?

But there's only really one guy in the story who seems to be blessed in any way - the guy lying on the side of the road. The guy who was beaten and robbed and then received a blessing of kindness from a stranger. Maybe this isn't primarily a story about a Samaritan. Maybe it's a story about the guy in need - about the guy who has been stripped of everything he thought had any worth, the guy who is completely dependent on others.

Maybe it's not about "Who can I help out of my abundance," but instead a story about, "Who would I want to help...me...when I am in need?" Because, you see, there was only one player in this story who could have possibly been a Pharisee. If I'm a Pharisee and I'm looking for myself in this story, there's only one guy left - the one in need.

To understand the Kingdom of Revolution, we must first come to grips with this fact - that we are the ones in need. We are the man on the side of the road. We are the corrupt official. We are the women selling sex in order to feed our families.

It means that we come to grips with the fact that this is a church full of liars and gossips and selfish people and greedy people and misfits...a group of really needy people looking for help.

If we can remove the veneer and learn to see that reality in ourselves, then we can see the humanity in others. If we can see ourselves as the man on the side of the road, then we can begin to...look up...to the Samaritan.

And that will change everything.

Let's pray.

Prayer

We're going to move now into a time of personal response. And there several ways to respond:

1. Singing

We're going to sing some songs together that help us reflect on some of these things.

While that singing is taking place, you will also have the opportunity for prayer.

2. Prayer

If you need prayer for anything at all, we have people here who are eager to do that.

Also, while that is going on, you'll have a chance to take communion

3. Communion

Communion is a symbolic act, instituted by Jesus as a way for us to remember the way he willingly died for us. The unleavened bread serves as a symbol of Jesus' body broken on the cross. The wine or juice symbolize his blood that was spilled for us.

We have people ready to serve you communion. Juice is on your left, wine is on your right. Feel free to partake of either, as it fits with your tradition. Just break off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup, and eat.

We offer communion each week for *anyone* who wants to take it. There's no membership requirement or hoops to jump through. You are guests at this symbolic table of Jesus, so please feel free to partake.

4. Giving

Lastly, during this time, you will have an opportunity to give financially to the work of this church. If you're a guest with us today, we don't expect you to give anything. However, for those who consider this your church home, and for those who believe in what we're trying to do here, this is our chance to give back to God a portion of what he has given us, and to support the work he has called this church to in Nakuru.

There is a tall box at the back with a slot in it. You can place your gifts in that box at any time as we are singing together.

So those are the four ways to respond: Singing, Prayer, Communion, and Giving. All will be happening simultaneously. There's no order you have to do them in. You don't have to do them all. You don't have to do any of them. This is your time to respond in whatever way you desire.

At the end of that time, I'll pray a prayer of blessing over you before you go.

Closing Prayer