

# Stories from the Road #1

## Stories Jesus tells as he is on his way to die outside Jerusalem

<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law<sup>a</sup> stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

<sup>26</sup> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

<sup>27</sup> 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 neighbour as yourself.'"

<sup>28</sup> "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

<sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

<sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite<sup>b</sup>, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan<sup>c</sup>, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii<sup>d</sup> 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.'

<sup>36</sup> "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

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

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37)<sup>e</sup>

**Q. What surprises, shocks or startles you in what you have just read?**

**Q. Which character in the story do you most identify with?**

**Q. What question would you like to ask Jesus?**

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<sup>a</sup> An expert in the law was a Jewish religious teacher.

<sup>b</sup> A Levite was someone who belonged to the priestly class.

<sup>c</sup> A Samaritan was a half-caste Jew. There were strong racial tensions between Jews and Samaritans.

<sup>d</sup> A denarius was the usual daily wage of a day labourer.

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Luke interviews eyewitnesses and writes his biography of Jesus to a particular person. "I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:4). In other words, he wants to add confirmation to what Theophilus already believes about Jesus. This story is from a collection of stories Jesus tells to his followers on the road as he heads towards Jerusalem to die (a journey which begins in Luke 9:51). Jesus is explaining what it will mean to follow him – and not just in a physical sense.

This story is framed by the little word "do". The story begins by someone asking what he must *do* to inherit eternal life. Jesus concludes by saying go and *do* likewise. So receiving eternal life is about acting like the Samaritan and showing mercy in a way that is *costly* and *undeserved*. *Costly...* The Samaritan's care costs him in time and resources. *Undeserved...* The Samaritan helps an enemy of his people (the injured man was presumably Jewish), who has no claim on his care.

Showing mercy that is costly and undeserved ("loving your neighbour") is a demanding requirement. One that we are not always consistently capable and willing to meet (let's be honest here!) If that is the requirement...what happens if we can't meet it?

The very next story in Luke's biography of Jesus helps to answer that question.

<sup>38</sup> As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. <sup>39</sup> She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" <sup>41</sup> "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, <sup>42</sup> but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

Martha is busy doing – busy serving others (in a grudging way!). But it is her sister Mary that Jesus commends. What's more important than doing is *listening* to Jesus.

So if we listen to Jesus' story once more... perhaps there is someone else that Jesus wants us to identify with. We have much in common with the *injured* man. Like the injured man, we are in need of mercy. God shows us mercy in a way that is *costly* and *undeserved*. *Costly...* He sends his son Jesus to die in our place. *Undeserved...* He does this when we are his enemies.

**Q. What surprises, shocks or startles you in what you have just read?**

**Q. In what way has this story confirmed or challenged your understanding of Jesus?**

**Q. What do you want to take away and ponder further?**