

The author behind the story

Can we get to know someone better through their words, Prof Jack Schafer at Western Illinois University in the Law Enforcement and Justice Administration (LEJA) Department and retired FBI Special Agent thinks we can...

He recently wrote an article called, "Reading people by the words they speak...." It begins, "If the eyes are the window to the soul, then words are the gateway to the mind. Words represent thoughts. The closest one person can get to understanding another person's thoughts is to listen to the words that he or she speaks or writes."

The dramatic tale of the Good Samaritan is one of most beloved and interesting of all Jesus' parables. It makes me ask the question, *Are there clues in this story to who Jesus was? Through the Good Samaritan can I understand him better?*

Prof Schafer speaks about Word Clues.... in our case the Gospels, He writes, "Word clues alone cannot determine a person's personality traits, but they do provide insights into a person's thought process and behavioural characteristics. Hypotheses can be developed based on Word Clues and then tested by using additional information elicited from the person or third-party corroboration."

That's good news for us, for it makes it possible for us to uncover through Jesus' words what he was really all about!

Is there any better word clue, where we can know Jesus, than the Good Samaritan?

So, what does this story teach us about Jesus?

It teaches us that he was a man of immense courage.

This story is subversive, political and counter cultural.

It is a brilliant story, that gives us a vivid insight into the life of the greatest person ever.

Courageous

It tells us that Jesus is courageous. He is critical against his own people. Jesus was known as a prophet, and prophets prior to Christ were individuals who were not afraid to challenge their own people. 700 years before Jesus was Jeremiah. He warned his people that unless they turned back to God their sacred city would be destroyed. They didn't listen to him and had Jeremiah put down a well. A prophet in these days usually suffered because of their honest words.

In the Good Samaritan, Jesus speaks against his own people. He makes the villains in the story the Jews. The Priest and the Levite, two people who one would have thought would have been full of integrity, but not so in the eyes of Jesus; they were simply too busy, too caught up in their own affairs, to help a dying man lying at the roadside.

So, Jesus does not miss the mark when he pinpoints their weaknesses.

Furthermore, he makes the enemy of the Jews the hero of the story. Make no mistake about this, this Samaritan, Jesus' shining example of righteousness, was a hated figure. He was an outcast. He was detested. This would have been painful for the Jewish leaders to hear that he was the one who showed mercy.

It was unspeakable that a Jew could see a Samaritan in a good light. But Jesus came to knock down walls and partitions that separated people. He was concerned with the Kingdom of God that welcomed Jew and Gentile. So he uses shock tactics and says that a Samaritan is capable of doing good.

So it goes without saying that he was a man of incredible courage; in fact, he was a revolutionary; he came to begin a revolution in the hearts of his own people, and this one short story tells us about courage that would lead him to the cross and to die for the sin of the world.

Jesus' message was counter cultural.

Remember the initial question and who asks it. It is an expert of the law and he asks what he must do to inherit eternal life, a question that I'm sure we have all thought of.

It would be of interest to analyse the words of this religious leader. It's a question of self-interest but that's for another time.

Christ had the hardest words to speak against the religious people of his time. In his eyes, they had lost sight of the goal of faith, to love God with all their heart and to love their neighbour as themselves and so Jesus points out plainly the error of their ways. In doing so, he is challenging their culture, and to challenge culture is a dangerous thing.

VISION

But the story of the Good Samaritan informs us that Jesus was a man of incredible vision. For in this story there are three, perhaps even more, things that Jesus wants his hearers to see about the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is about healing.

The man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho was minding his own business. He was viciously attacked and left half dead. He was in need of immediate healing. Now the Priest and the Levite, both religious men and workers in the Temple scurried by – Jesus used the excellent phrase – “on the other side”. The actual Greek word tells us that they intentionally crossed the road to be distanced from the man.

They kept their distance from the half-dead man, because the Jewish system of purity was so severe that to touch this man would have defiled them, especially if they were to have his blood on their hands.

Now the issue that Jesus is drawing our attention to here was that no amount of religiosity would make this man better, no amount of temple worship would change this man's situation. It required a spirit of healing and compassion and only one out of the three were prepared to do this, the Good Samaritan; so, Jesus is casting a vision that in the Kingdom of God, there is a priority, to heal people and to make them better. Jesus came to usher in the Kingdom of God, and one of the signs was healing. He is saying, to the lawyer, if you want to inherit eternal life then you must have the compassion of the Good Samaritan.

The Kingdom of God is about peace.

The story of the Good Samaritan tells us that it's time to stop fighting and building walls; it's time to stop petty arguments; it's time to lay down your weapons and live in peace; it's time to be prepared to get on your hands and knees and help each other. It's time to offer a helping hand to those who are in need.

The Kingdom is about action.

Jesus' final words in the story. *“Go and do likewise!”* ...That was in response to his question to the lawyer, *“Which of these three men do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers.”* And the reply was the one who showed mercy.

In these four words are the catch to the story... *“Go and do likewise!”* the Jewish law demands this perfect love; He is saying to the lawyer, if you are really serious about eternal life, become like the Good Samaritan, but if we take it another step, if you want to inherit eternal life, become like God.

For, God's love is infinitely more profound and amazing than the Good Samaritan's. The Good Samaritan sacrificed his time and money to care for a wounded enemy. What Christ did to redeem his people far exceeds the lavish act of benevolence pictured in the parable.

God gave his own eternal Son to die for sinners who don't deserve it. Spiritually speaking we are like the man on the roadside and Christ comes to us because he has a heart of compassion and because he loves us.

Jesus himself perhaps felt like the Good Samaritan, despised by his own, and yet he reached out in love to those who hated him; even on the cross, as he was dying, his words were about forgiveness. *"Forgive them Father for they don't understand what they are doing."*

Jesus' response to the lawyer, *"Go and do likewise"*, should have led the lawyer to pray for forgiveness and say, *"I just can't do this- Help me. Have mercy on me"*. But we are not told of the lawyer's response. There is silence – nothing- the story finishes here.. That probably sums up his response. Like the rich young ruler, he went away sad.

You see, the lawyer wanted to fulfil the law, but there was no way that he could fulfil it and love like the Good Samaritan. Like us all, he needed someone who could fulfil it for him, and this is where we begin to see the real Jesus coming alive for us.

For he was perfect, in his relationship to God, and in all he said and did and so he fulfilled his perfection by dying obediently on the cross that we might be forgiven.

So that, by looking to Christ and trusting in him as our Saviour, we are forgiven. The Apostle Paul wrote, "When we were still without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us Rom 5:6-8.

The story of the Good Samaritan is not just about encouraging us to look out for those less fortunate than ourselves, there is something much deeper and that is to understand that if we really want to inherit eternal life, then we need to see and meet the one who has attained it for us, and that is the author of this parable; in fact the author of life, Jesus Christ. The way to eternal life is through trust in Him and to know that we will never be able to fulfil the demands of the law, but we can be made perfect through his sacrifice, through his courage, his vision and his healing.

So I began the sermon by asking the question, does this story give us an insight into the life of Jesus? Well, I believe it does. I hope that the Good Samaritan is more than a nice story to you. I hope that it has words of eternal life for you and that by going and doing likewise, you will inherit eternal life.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen.