

Examine the Evidence

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” from Luke 10: 25-37, the Parable of the Good Samaritan

Jesus looked for the best in everyone. So many of his fellow Jewish countrymen thought Samaritans were the scum of the earth, but Jesus was willing to look at the evidence. He didn't blindly go along with the court of public opinion. He was a fact checker.

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the evidence is this: which of the three men passing by helped the man who had been attacked by the robbers? The Jewish priest, the Jewish Levite, or the Samaritan layman? If it had been you who were left for dead on the roadside, who would have proven himself to be your neighbor? Obviously, Sam was the man.

Jesus' people also didn't think much of the Roman soldiers who occupied their country. And who would? That any one country has the arrogance to think it has the right to rule the world is an affront to the Lordship of God. Such arrogance is to be condemned. Yet, when it comes to individual soldiers, Jesus again was willing to look at the evidence.

In Luke 7: 1-10, we find an occupying Roman centurion who wants Jesus to cure his ill servant. There's no doubt in his mind that Jesus can do it. He says so in an amazing statement of faith. And about this centurion, Jesus says, *“Not even in Israel have I found such faith.”*

In the two above instances, the evidence that Jesus examined was either in the form of an action taken or a statement made. But sometimes the fact that Jesus relied upon was his understanding of human nature. We find this in the story of his coming to the rescue of the woman who was going to be stoned to death for adultery, John 8: 1-11.

What did Jesus say to the men who were ready to execute her? *“Let him who is without sin cast the first stone,”* which is a statement based upon fact. The fact is that no one is without sin. After the men left, he then said to her, *“Go your way and don't do this again.”*

I wonder if any of these men focused upon the abundant evidence of God's mercy in their lives. I think we all do. We all should. I'm reminded of David Currie's prayer, *“O God, our Father, you give us mercy to make us tender toward others: we acknowledge that all too often we let mercy wither to justice, justice to vengeance, which makes us brittle and hard toward other persons. Forgive us our misuse of such treasure. Help us to receive mercy and to be more merciful to others, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen”*

Too often we think and speak in stereotypes. We categorize, even denigrate, whole groups of people and are reluctant to give an individual from such a group a chance. Or, on the other hand, if a few individuals from such groups get into trouble, we assume the worst of the whole group. 99% of these folks may be good people, yet we judge all of them by the actions of less than 1%.

With Jesus, though, fact checks include the actions of a Samaritan, the faith statement of a Roman centurion, and the reality that we all receive God's mercy. - DJ