

2/18/24

Sermon: Model Neighbors Reflect Christ

Scripture: Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18, CTW Psalm 119:33-40

Hymns: 512, 689, 776

Theme: God's Word teaches that a neighbor is more than the person who lives next door to us. The model neighbor that the children of God are to be is that of one who is kind, honest and loving. It is this reflection of the character of Christ that will make an impact and cause the light of Christ to shine bright.

I. Introduction: How Do You See Your Neighborhood?

A. Of Your Childhood: One of the things I liked about where I lived in the country as I was growing up was the neighbors. We knew each other and were there for each other in all times of need. We had good neighbors and some of the people continue to be my friends to this day.

Having good neighbors is something everybody likes and appreciates... but I think the definition has changed.

I have a friend that lived in Baltimore in the 50's and 60's. His street was all duplexes with side-by-side front porches and yards. In the evening in the summer, the people would all sit on their front porches and talk back and forth while the kids played in the street or in the yards.

Everyone knew everyone else, you were always in each other's houses and you felt more like family than anything else.

However, today my friend claims that what ruined all the neighborhood cohesiveness and led to the current crime-filled neighborhoods in Baltimore was the invention of two evil things that we could not live without now...**air conditioning and television...**

B. Of Your Current neighborhood: Currently, Dani and I live in a neighborhood that you would call a bedroom community...we know a few of the people by name but for the most part since we all leave for work early in the morning and

come back at all times in the evening, you never get to spend much time with each other.

With the exception of our nearest neighbors, we don't really talk...

If pressed on the issue we would all appreciate the concept of having good neighbors however, in order to have good neighbors; you have to be a good neighbor yourself. That takes effort...effort that we might not have the time nor the inclination to put forth.

C. Today we will look at God's concept of "good neighbor". We find that the biblical outline of a neighbor is more than today's reality of neighbor as simply "the one who lives next door to us."

In passage this passage from Leviticus, there are **three adjectives** that would define "A Model Neighbor." A Model Neighbor is one who is:

Kind (19:9-10)

Honest (19:11-18a)

Loving (19:18b)

II. THE KIND NEIGHBOR (19:9-10)

"When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God."

The society of 15 century BC, when God gave these instructions through Moses was largely agricultural. Therefore it made sense that God gives His instructions making reference to harvest and reaping.

A. As we can see God gave them specific rules. He told them:

1. Do not reap to the very edges of your field.
2. Do not gather the gleanings.

3. Do not go over a second time.
4. Do not pick what has fallen.

The purpose for these regulations is given in verse 10, "...Leave them for the poor and the alien..."

As you will recall from the message last week on tithing, the reality for the people back then was that that the entire harvest, good or bad, was a blessing of God and therefore He could indeed direct what was to be done with it.

That feeling has been lost in today's "I did it my way" society...we genuinely believe that the things in our pantry at home, belong to us and we control where it goes.

God wants his people to seek the good of others and learn to show kindness to them, and so the idea of us being the sole and proud owner of our assets works against this concept.

In **Ruth 2:18-20**, remember that Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law was surprised at the quantity of the food Ruth gathered in Boaz's fields. She knew the man was kind and had allowed Ruth to glean far **more than normally was possible**. She remarked about the kindness of the wealthy man Boaz.

This was the concept of **hesed**, or "**lovingkindness**" that we have spoken about before. This is God's wish that "**neighborhood**" be defined by its "**lovingkindness**".

B. God's children in the New Testament are to be kind in the same way.

The following fictional story from 1940's evangelist Harry C. Maybry helps to illustrate this point:

A man had just arrived in Heaven, and he told Peter how grateful he was to be in such a glorious place.

He asked Peter to give him one glimpse into Hell in order that he might appreciate his good fortune even more. Peter agreed to give him a glimpse.

In Hell the man saw a long table extending as far as the eye could reach, laden down with the most delicious of all varieties of foods.

But everyone around the table was starving to death. When asked for an explanation, Peter said, "Everyone is required to take food from the table only with four-foot-long chopsticks.

They are so long that no one can reach the food from the table to his mouth, and therefore each one is dying of starvation."

When they returned to Heaven, the new arrival saw an identical table, laden down with identical foods, but everyone around the table was happy and well fed.

Then he said to Peter: "What do they use to take the food from the table?" and Peter answered, "Same thing, four-foot-long chopsticks."

At that the man inquired: "Then why are all the people in Hell starving to death while all those up here are so well fed and happy?"

Peter replied: "In Heaven we feed one another."

III. THE HONEST NEIGHBOR (19:11-18a).

A. God Requires that we Be Honest in our Dealings With one Another if we are to be His People: In this Psalm He reminds us: "Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another. Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord. **Do not defraud your neighbor** or rob him. Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight. Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind but fear your God. I am the Lord. **Do not pervert justice;** do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great but judge your neighbor fairly. Do not go about spreading slander among your people. **Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life.** I am the Lord. Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you

will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people..."

B. The underlining theme here is that good neighboring requires being honest. Verses 11-18 consist of a series of 14 commands. Boiled down, it makes a lot of sense:

1. You don't take what belongs to your neighbor.
2. You don't show favoritism.
3. You act on good will for the benefit of your brother.

Do you see the theme from the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 here?
"love one another as I have loved you."

C. Why should I be honest?

1. Because God says so.
2. Because he is our neighbor.
3. We need to be able to trust one another as we trust God and He trusts us to administer the love He has given us.

IV. THE LOVING NEIGHBOR (19:18b)

A. This verse appears in both the New and Old Testaments...Pretty powerful stuff! "...but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."

This verse ties together the other two principles of the concept I call "**good neighborhood**" and any other principle that we may have in Scripture.

The command says that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves:

1. We take care of ourselves.
2. We actively seek the best for ourselves.
3. If we do that for ourselves, it should be easy to show it to our neighbors...

Question for you to ponder...who do you show that kind of hospitality/care/love to? Do you need to expand that?

B. Remember How Jesus summed the entire Old Testament in two commands (Matthew 22:37-40)

1. Love the Lord Your God with all your heart and all your

soul and all your mind.

2. Love your neighbor as yourself.

We should not make the mistake of removing the words “your neighbor as” to change the command to read: “Love yourself!” The current trend in society is that if we love our neighbor at all, it is a different love...a lesser and non-committal love that we dole out in drips and drabs, to only the people who agree with how we feel about things...**take politics for instance...**

C. Jesus had a different kind of love in mind:

1. We don't love our neighbor because they are lovely.

2. We don't love them because they are cool to hang out with.

The following story of a mother and his son illustrates this truth: Under her placemat one morning at breakfast a mother found a bill made out by her small son, Bradley, aged eight—

“Mother owes the following to Bradley: for running errands, 25 cents; for being good, 10 cents; for taking music lessons, 15 cents; for extras, 5 cents. Total, 55 cents.

The Mother smiled but made no comment. At lunch Bradley found the bill under his plate with 55 cents and another piece of paper neatly folded like the first.

Opening it he read, Bradley owes Mother: for nursing him through the Chicken Pox, **nothing**; for being good to him, **nothing**; for clothes, shoes and playthings purchased for him, **nothing**; for his playroom, **nothing**; for his meals, **nothing**. Total Due: **nothing**.

Here, the mother is modeling the heart of God for His people...**His idea of love after all these years, has not changed, even though we have.** He still holds up **Hesed** (lovingkindness) as the gold standard we are to emulate for one another, always!

V. CONCLUSION: God's Neighborhood is the World.

In today's society, there is a shortage of "good neighborhood" among us.

A. If you took ownership of the directives God gives in this passage, what would you do differently in your neighborhood? Make a list!

The path to having a pleasant neighborhood starts with me and you. To have good neighbors **we need to be good neighbors ourselves.**

B. How might you expand that beyond your limits of the concept in order to embrace God's goals for us?

God's Word teaches that a neighbor is more than the person who lives next door to us. The model neighbor that the children of God are to be is that of one who is **kind, honest and loving**. It is this reflection of the character of Christ that will make an impact in our neighborhood and cause the light of Christ to shine bright.

Amen? Let us pray for the strength and wisdom to do what we are being called to do...