



Refugee Week

The Good Samaritan

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The covenanted Israelites were given a list of stipulations in Exodus 21-23. If the Israelites wanted to live in a relationship with Yahweh, they had to obey the law (Exodus 21-23). These laws were the requirement for the Israelites to be part of Yahweh's kingdom. Exodus 23 comprises nine laws of justice and mercy provided to the Israelites, and verse 9 says, "do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners because you were foreigners in Egypt". Here, God reminds the Israelites of their experience as foreigners in Egypt, where they were in slavery for 40 years.

The reason for the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt was the new Egyptian king. He sensed the growing number of Israelites as a threat to his national security and thus decided to deal "shrewdly" with them (Exodus 1:10). As a result, Pharaoh degraded the Israelites' working environment and used infanticide to curb population growth. It was the slavery that made the Israelites' lives miserable (Exodus 1:13-14). God, in Exodus 23:9, reminds the Israelites of their experience in Egypt and never to treat a foreigner the way they were treated.

In the New Testament, Jesus clarifies this in detail through the parable of the 'Good Samaritan' (Luke 10:25-37). The parable begins with an expert in the law asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds with, "what is written in the law?" The expert, being a Jew, answers quickly, "love your God and love your neighbour".

To inherit eternal life following the greatest commandment is enough for the expert, but the question here is not about what the law says but who is my neighbour? And this is where Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The parable has two main characters: the one who offers help and the one who receives. Both the characters have differences based on their background and beliefs. One is a Samaritan, and the other is believed to be a Jew, as most often Jews travelled along that route. Here, Jesus gives an example of two people from vastly different backgrounds, loving and respecting each other irrespective of their religion and belief.



For the expert, loving your neighbour meant loving your fellow Jew. Through the parable, Jesus questions the expert's thinking and conveys the idea that a neighbour can be anybody, not just a member of a homogeneous society. We are no different than the expert in the law if we only love those whose opinions are similar to ours. Jesus does not judge but instead, embraces others unconditionally.

Refugees and asylum seekers from collectivist cultural backgrounds are burdened by the struggle to integrate into individualistic Australian society. The initial feelings of an asylum seeker upon entering a foreign land are of fear and insecurity. Some of the reasons behind resettlement's difficulties include beginning a new life in a different country, different language, and other cultural expectations. Due to these reasons, refugees face various social and economic challenges. As a result, they always seek to resettle into their cultural communities.

Another reason why asylum seekers live in isolation in their communities, is that they are perceived as a threat to Australia. In 2018, 40 per cent of Australians saw immigrants and refugees as a critical threat to national security. These stereotypes lead to mistreatment of asylum seekers and limited opportunities provided for them to flourish.

The above presumptions about asylum seekers can allow history to repeat, whereby we become like Pharaoh and the asylum seekers are the Israelites. This is why, in the Old Testament, God reminds the Israelites of their trouble in Egypt and commands them to never treat a stranger the same way they were treated.

In the New Testament, Jesus challenges the expert, reminding him to love his neighbour without prejudice. As followers of Jesus, we have a spiritual duty to not only care about those who arrive in Australia from other nations, but also to love them unconditionally as Jesus did.