

Priests, Levites and the Subway Photographer Who Documented Man's Death

Imagine if the *New York Post* existed in Bible days. And imagine if the cover photo showed the man Jesus described in Luke 10—a man who was attacked by robbers, stripped of his clothes, beaten down and half dead.

Now imagine the uproar if that same image showed the priest and the Levite passing him by before the Good Samaritan finally stopped to save his life.

Fast-forward a couple of thousand years and the Parable of the Good Samaritan is playing out in front of our eyes—with an unfortunate twist that's raising ethical concerns about the actions of a freelance photographer.

The *New York Post* ran a front page photo of a man who had been pushed onto the subway tracks. The image shows the subway fast approaching as the man tries to climb back up to safety. He was unsuccessful and the subway killed him.

The photographer, R. Umar Abbasi, said he wasn't trying to take a photo of the man. He told NBC's *Today Show* on Wednesday that he was trying to alert the motorman by flashing his camera.

"It took me a second to figure out what was happening ... I saw the lights in the distance. My mind was to alert the train," Abbasi said. "The people who were standing close to him ... they could have moved and grabbed him and pulled him up. No one made an effort."

Abassi's decision to collect a paycheck for his photo rather than playing the hero has sparked public outrage. Should

photographers document what they see and then walk on by without lifting a finger to help, like the priest and the Levite in Jesus' parable? Or should the media put down their tools and, like the Good Samaritan, save a life?

I'm a member of the media and I'm outraged. Since when is getting the cover story more important than a human life? Abbasi should have rushed to the victim's aid and pulled him up before the subway train ended his life, regardless of what other onlookers were doing. Instead, he collected what I am sure was a tidy sum for the dramatic photo, which carries the title "Pushed on the subway track, this man is about to die."

Beyond all this, though, the event in that New York subway is a statement of human nature—and it's nothing new. Jesus pointed out the problem more than 2,000 years ago in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. When the priest saw the robbed man laying there half dead, he passed by him on the other side of the road. The Levite did the same thing. These were men of God and they nonetheless ignored a helpless man at the point of death.

So before we crucify Abbasi for a poor decision, let's look at the bigger problem: the love of many has grown cold. Jesus gave one new commandment to love one another (John 13:34). In this case, it looks like the photographer loved money more than he loved his neighbor. And, let's remember, the man was pushed down there at his peril before Abbasi ever arrived on the scene. But these men are not alone. It's the unfortunate condition of the human heart. And only the gospel can transform us from lackadaisical Levites to **Spirit-filled** Samaritans who value human life.

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