

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

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We want to look together at the well-known parable, the Good Samaritan. The unique thing about this parable is that it doesn't actually say in the text, "And He spoke a parable unto them." Normally, a parable is described as a parable in the Bible, but this one isn't.

What is a parable? The word "parable" in the Bible comes from three Greek words: para-bol-e or "parabole," which literally means "to lay alongside." Jesus takes an earthly story and lays it alongside a heavenly meaning. So, the definition of a parable is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." The earthly stories are always taken from real life; sometimes, a true story that He knows something about. Some believe this story of the good Samaritan had actually taken place, and it was common knowledge of the time, as Jesus relates it.

Like the parable of the prodigal son, the parable of the good Samaritan is often misunderstood and misinterpreted. People most often misinterpret parables because they try to read into the parable things that God never intended to be in the parable.

I read a quote recently that said, "Never take out of a text what is not in the text." I like that. Sometimes, we want all the facets of the parable to be allegorical or spiritualized or to be a "typology" when it was never intended to be that. Usually, whatever precipitates or causes the giving of the parable is what the parable is about in its main theme or thrust. Most parables generally have one main lesson that God wants us to learn.

A parable is a window for us to see the world around us. And it's also a mirror for us to see ourselves. So we'll look through the window to see the world around us—then and now—and we'll look in the mirror to see ourselves now.

We'll see in this story of the good Samaritan that it involves violence, crime, religious and racial discrimination, hatred, neglect, and loss of compassion. It sounds like we're watching the evening news. It sounds like a mugging and robbery in LA or a mugging in New York City. It's so common today in our culture that it shows us that man hasn't changed. We still live in a very violent, uncompassionate world.

How appropriate for our times this story is. I believe the Bible is relevant for our times. People say to me, "You just preach the Bible?! How do you make it relevant?" I don't make the Bible relevant; it is relevant. It is the living, powerful Word of God.

This story teaches us that we are to have compassion in an uncompassionate world, that we need to "love [our] neighbor as [ourselves]" (Mark 12:31), and we cannot separate our relationship with God from our relationship with people or our neighbors.

There are three sections in this text. The first is the priority of love, seen in great questions in

verses 25-29. "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?'" Jesus answered his question with a question. "So he answered and said, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself,'" which are quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5, a portion of the great Shema, and Leviticus 19:18. "And He said to him, 'You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.' But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"

I want you to note the four questions that appear in this text. The first one is in verse 25: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The second two are in verse 26: Jesus asked, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" And the fourth question is in verse 29: The lawyer asked, "And who is my neighbor?" trying to justify himself.

Here is a key to interpreting parables. Most of the time—not always—when a parable is given by Jesus, it is caused by some circumstance or issue or question preceding it. So when you study a parable, you should always back up and read the text before it, read the context, and find out what caused Jesus to give the parable. In this case, it was a series of questions.

"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" was asked by a certain lawyer. He was not a civil lawyer like we have today; he was a scribe or, theologian or scholar. His study of the Law was the Law of God and the Bible. They didn't separate their civil law from their Biblical Law. He knew the Bible.

And the fact that the lawyer stood up verse 25, indicates that Jesus was most likely seated and teaching, and when He was teaching, others would be seated around Him. The rabbis would be seated to teach, and the people would be seated as well. So when this man stood up, it was an antagonistic gesture that was somewhat hostile.

If you were in church on Sunday morning, and someone stood up in the middle of the sermon, it's like, "What's goin' on here!"

So the lawyer stood up and confronted Jesus with this question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And notice that verse 25 indicates that this question was asked testing Him or trying to tempt Jesus; his motive wasn't pure. He didn't really want to know the answer; he wanted to trap Jesus in His response. He most likely wanted Jesus to say, "Disregard the Law; just believe Me. That's all you have to do." Then, he might have made an issue out of the fact that Jesus denied the Law and taught something different.

Jesus cannot be trapped. They came to Him and asked if it was okay to pay taxes to Caesar. They thought, If He says "Yes," then people will be upset with Him, because we hate Rome. If He says "No," we'll let Rome know, and they'll arrest Him. Either way, we got Him!

But Jesus answered their question by saying, "Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?" Notice that He didn't have any money on Him. I relate to Jesus; I

don't carry a lot of money.

They said, "Caesar's."

And Jesus said, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:24-25). And they were in awe of His response.

So this time, they were trying to trick Jesus with the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Like most people, this is assuming that I need to do something to get eternal life. Christianity says "Done," while religion says, "Do." Christianity says that Jesus died for your sins if you believe in Him. And believing in Him is not a work; faith is not a work. We are not saved by our works. It's simply trusting Christ's finished work on the Cross to save us. We sing:

"Nothing in my hands I bring,

Simply to Thy cross, I cling."

So we don't work to be saved. But we have this concept that we have to do something to be saved.

But the question assumes we have eternal life. Now, eternal life is not just an eternal existence. Everyone who lives on earth will one day die and will still exist—either in heaven or in hell. You ask, "What determines where we will spend eternity?" Your relationship to Christ; whether you have trusted Him, believed on Him and received Him as your Lord and Savior. Where you are with God is based on where you are with Jesus Christ.

Have you trusted Him, who died and rose from the dead?

So what does Jesus say to this question, verse 26? He asks the lawyer, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" This is one of my favorite points in this whole text, because Jesus always took questions to the Bible. We should always turn to the Bible to answer life's great questions. What could be more important than, "How do I get to heaven when I die and have eternal life?" We find the answer in the Bible.

"The B-i-b-l-e;

Yes, that's the book for me.

I stand alone on the Word of God,

The B-i-b-l-e."

So, we should always be opening the Bible to answer life's perplexing questions.

Whenever Jesus was asked a question, He said, "What do the Scriptures say? What does the

Bible say?" O the heartache, pain and misery that could be spared us and the church if we simply would open our Bibles, go to the Scriptures and ask, "What does God say about this issue? How am I to view this situation?" So always open the Bible and get your answers from the Word of God, like Jesus did. So Jesus gave this lawyer Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 in response.

But the problem was that this lawyer or scribe would not admit that he had not loved God "with all [his] heart, with all [his] soul, with all [his] strength, and with all [his] mind," and "[his] neighbor as [himself]." Rather, he wanted to save face. Then Jesus said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this, and you will live."

The problem with this scribe—and with us—is that you can't love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind because you are a fallen sinner. It's not possible for you to do that in your fallen, unregenerate, unsaved state. I don't think anyone loves God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind. And we certainly don't love our neighbor as ourselves.

If you live in southern California and drive the freeways, you go out and drive and say, "I just love everyone on the road!" No. By the way, I hate people honking at me; don't honk at me when you see me. Only honk if it's life or death.

But loving your neighbor as yourself is hard. "I don't like that person; he looks weird!" Or "I like that person; they look like me, talk like me, and think like me. But I really don't love my neighbor as I should."

So one of the main things in this parable is to show us that we need a Savior. I myself can't love God, can't love my neighbor; I need Jesus' work on the Cross in order to be forgiven of my sins and have eternal life. So we can't "do" to be saved, but we need to trust and believe in Jesus Christ.

So, this lawyer was willing to justify himself. Then Jesus said, "Right answer; spot on! Do that, and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, to save face, to divert, to change the definition of neighbor and to debate the whole issue. So in wanting to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "Ah, let's talk about this. 'Who is my neighbor?' How do we define 'neighbor'?" He didn't want to confess his sin; that he hadn't loved and lived the way he should. He wanted to avoid the real issue of his sin and failure to keep the Law by proposing a theological debate.

This is so common today. I can't tell you how many times men have come to me in church and want to discuss and debate theological issues, usually it's about prophecy and future things and the book of Revelation. "Are you a mid-trib or post-trib, or do you believe in all-millennialism or a-millennialism?" They want to debate theological issues of the end times. But I happen to know that they aren't right with their wife. They're not loving their wife. They're not getting along in their marriage. They're having marriage problems right now, but they want to discuss eschatology! It's not going to happen. You go home and "love your [wife], just as Christ also loved the church" (Ephesians 5:25).

People get all upset about things they don't know in the Bible. I'm more upset about things I do know: that I am to "love [my wife], just as Christ also loved the church." I'm to be the husband God wants me to be. So don't divert from your obedience to God in dealing with your sins by debating theological issues and scriptures.

So, this lawyer/scribe is diverting by questioning who his neighbor is. But Jesus is going to use his question to teach the parable of the good Samaritan. It is important that we obey the Word of God. Then, He will give us more light and more understanding. To this lawyer, a neighbor was just a problem to debate and discuss.

Now we move to verses 30-35, which is a picture of love, the story of the good Samaritan. And this parable is in response to the question, "And who is my neighbor?" The answer is anyone who has a need.

"Then Jesus answered and said: 'A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.'" Sounds like the evening news. "Now, by chance, a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise, a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.'" There was no mention of compassion by the priest or the Levite. The Samaritan had compassion on him.

Verse 34, "So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'"

This parable is going to teach us who our neighbor is. And what's better, it will teach us to whom we are to be neighborly.

Verse 30 says, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho." This is a 17-mile journey. And this journey, from Jerusalem on the mount of Zion down into the Jordan Valley by the Dead Sea where Jericho is located, is on a very steep, very windy, very narrow road, and it is very treacherous. You drop from above sea level to 3,000 feet below sea level, which is the lowest part on earth. This road had come to be called "the highway of blood" because it was notorious for robbers and, thieves and murderers. And many priests and Levites lived in Jericho, but they served at the temple in Jerusalem. So they would have to make this treacherous, dangerous journey.

In the parable, the priest first came by. He saw the man who had been bloodied, beaten, and robbed but went by him on the other side. In addition to being a priest, he also was a Levite from the tribe of Aaron. He no doubt had been in the temple serving the Lord doing his priestly duty.

If you are beaten, robbed and laying on the highway half dead, who would be the best person to walk up? A pastor, a minister, a priest. So the man probably was looking at this priest and

thinking, O, praise be to God! A priest, a man of God. I'm saved! But the priest walked by.

A while back, I was driving my son's VW bus to get it repaired when I broke down on Haun Road. And I had forgotten my phone. I was standing out by the highway, and I can't tell you how many people from the church recognized me and just waved as they drove by. I thought, Lord, thank you for that loving congregation. I even had people come up to me that Sunday and say, "I saw you by the road there. What was going on?"

"I needed your help! Thanks a lot!"

Then, a Levite showed up. A Levite was from the tribe of Levi but wasn't a priest. They were assistants to the priests. They worked in the temple, in the synagogue and assisted the priests in their priestly duties. So this Levite was no doubt coming back from his duties in Jerusalem.

And verse 32 says that the Levite "looked," so he saw the man lying on the road. And the priest "saw him," verse 31. And the Levite, like the priest, "passed by on the other side." What a picture of lovelessness! They had religion, but they didn't have love.

The story doesn't say why they passed by. Now, if you were a priest, the Bible forbade you from touching a dead body because you would become ceremoniously unclean. So perhaps he justified his actions by thinking that he couldn't touch this man, as he might be dead or would soon die. Then, he couldn't fulfill his obligations as a priest.

It's interesting that Jesus said, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6). Or this man might have thought, It's not my fault. Am I my brother's keeper? The answer is "Yes." I'm in a hurry; I want to get home. I've been at the temple serving for days! My wife's expecting me to get home. She probably cooked a meal for me. So I don't have the time. Let someone else get involved.

Sometimes we serve the Lord by going to church, praying, and then we see a need but don't want to deal with it. Let someone else do it. So, we make up excuses rather than getting involved. Micha 6:8 says, "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

So the priest and Levite were showing evidence that they didn't love God, and they didn't love their neighbor as themselves. To both of them, their neighbor was a nuisance to avoid.

Now we have a picture of love and compassion, verses 33-35. "But a certain Samaritan..." We know that Samaritans were hated and despised by the Jews. They were half Jew and half Gentile. They were a mixed race, were apostate and had a false religion. They had their own temple on Mount Gerizim. The Jews hated them, and they hated the Jews.

In the Greek, this parable starts with the Samaritan for emphasis. It must have blown the sandals off everyone who was listening to this at that time.

The man who was beaten, robbed and laying on the highway was most likely—it's inferred in the story but not explicit—a Jew. Him being Jewish would make it an even greater message of compassion for the Samaritan to show this compassion to a Jew. The hearers would have thought that another Jew would help the Jew, but no, they didn't; it was a Samaritan, a despised enemy of the Jews, who helped.

Now the Samaritan, "...as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine..." for medicinal purposes; no doubt he didn't have an emergency kit, so he had to tear his shirt into strips for bandages "...and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day when he departed, he took out two denarii..." or two-days wages "...gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'"

Our Christian love is to transcend race, religion, and nationality. Jesus said we should love even our enemies (Matthew 5:44). All men are not God's children by regeneration, but they are by creation. Every human being is created in the image of God. So, love for others is evidence of our salvation.

I want to point out five marks, or what is involved in loving your neighbor. Number one is compassion, verse 33. The Samaritan "saw him [and] he had compassion."

I found it interesting that the word "compassion" is used primarily, almost exclusively, for Jesus Christ in the New Testament. It is found in a couple of parables: in one instance, in the parable of the father who had compassion toward his prodigal son, which is a picture of the love of God. "Compassion" is used in the epistles as the fruit of the Spirit. The word "compassion" means "to feel others' pain inwardly, to care for others." It's their pain in your heart. It's to empathize with another.

Someone said, "Pity weeps and walks away; compassion comes to help and stay." When we pity someone, we walk by them. When we have compassion, we feel their pain, and it moves us to take action. Someone said, "You are never more like Jesus Christ than when you feel another's hurt and seek to help." I like the statement, "In every pain that rends the heart, the Man of Sorrows has a part." Jesus feels our pain, so we should feel others' pain.

Number two, he had contact, verse 34. "So he went to him." He didn't run from him; he didn't cross to the other side of the road. In those days, it is believed that roads were very narrow. The priest and Levite probably had to step over the man in trying to avoid him. But the Samaritan went to him.

We need to make contact with sinners. We're always trying to avoid needy people, hurting people, suffering people, or those we don't care for. But Jesus was attracted to them and went to them to care for them. If there was a crowd, the one who had the greatest need was the focus of His attention, and He made contact with that person.

Number three, he cared for him, verse 34. He “took care of him.”

Number four, it cost him something: money, time, energy, effort, verses 34-35. He “bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn,” and he spent “two denarii.” Many times, we avoid compassion because we don’t want to pay the price. But the blessing of being compassionate and helping far outweighs avoiding helping others.

Number five, it took courage. It must have taken a lot of courage for this Samaritan to put a beat-up, bloodied, and robbed Jew on his donkey and not have people think that he was guilty of the crime. He put a Jew on his donkey and went into town to an inn.

So we have the priority of love and the picture of love in this Samaritan.

The wrap-up is in verses 36-37, the practice of love, the great command. “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” I want you to notice how Jesus rephrases the question, “Who is my neighbor?” But Jesus said, “Who was neighborly?”

Verse 37, “And he said, ‘He who showed mercy on him.’” Notice that this lawyer does not want to use the word “Samaritan.” Mercy is not giving us what we deserve; God’s grace is giving us what we don’t deserve. So, the Samaritan showed mercy on the man.

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’” This was the command.

The point that Jesus made is that it’s not, “Who is my neighbor,” but “Who should I be a neighbor to?” And the answer is anyone who is in need.

“Well, he’s a different race. He’s a different religion. He’s in a different status of life. I can’t help that person.” No, anyone who is in need is my neighbor. That’s the point.

So what should we do? “You shall love the Lord your God with all our heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31). But in our own strength and ability, we fall short because we’re sinful. And we don’t love others as we love ourselves. This is so important. It has been said, “People will never care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

So, we learn from this parable that we should love God and love our neighbor. The lawyer saw the neighbor as a problem to just theologically discuss. The priest and Levite saw the man as a nuisance to avoid. But the Samaritan was his neighbor and served him and helped him.

The point of the parable is that we all fall short. “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

“Not the labors of my hands

Can fulfill the law's demands; ...

Thou must save, and Thou alone."

We know that "By the works of the law, no flesh shall be justified" (Galatians 2:16).

So don't think, Okay, I gotta be a good Samaritan!

We have good Samaritan laws in many of the states in the United States. If you see someone who needs help and you don't help, you can be liable. If at least you don't call 911 for help, you could be in trouble if someone's in need.

But that's not going to get you to heaven through the "pearly gates." What gets you to heaven is believing in Jesus Christ. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "There is none righteous, no, not one....By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified" (Romans 3:10, 20). But "By grace, you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

So, if you haven't trusted Jesus Christ, that's your greatest need.