

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

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Today we are going to take look at the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. This parable is among the most familiar parts of the Bible and some literary critics consider it the greatest story ever told.

To refresh our memory, I'll read it and then we'll see what spiritual nuggets we can glean from it...

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²⁵ And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" ²⁷ 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.'" ²⁸ And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." ²⁹ But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ 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. ³¹ Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. ³³ But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. 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. ³⁵ 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.'" ³⁶ So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" ³⁷ And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

The parable is initiated by: *A certain lawyer [who] stood up and tested Him*: This man was referred to as a lawyer because he was an expert in the Jewish Mosaic and rabbinical law. Notice that he *tested* Jesus. The

idea behind the ancient Greek word for *tested* doesn't necessarily mean he intended to entrap Him. This may have been an honest question from a sincere seeker.

- While the text here doesn't say, most lawyers at that time were Pharisees... religious leaders who thought you could earn favor with God for salvation by keeping the minutest details of the Law.

I can't help but interject a couple jokes about lawyers here since they are so common and often ring true...

- What do you call a priest that becomes a lawyer? A father-in-law.
- What did the lawyer name his daughter? Sue!
- Arguing with a lawyer is like wrestling with a pig in mud — sooner or later, you realize they like it.
- Someone mistakenly left the cages open in the Reptile House at the zoo, and the head keeper needed help corralling the snakes so he yelled, "Quick, call a lawyer!" "A lawyer? Why?" "We need someone who speaks their language."

Alright, back to our story... The question the lawyer asked Jesus was: *What shall I do to inherit eternal life?* Eternal life certainly refers to life in heaven after death of our mortal bodies but also refers to the quality of life in the here and now.

John 10:10 – *I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*

Our Lord has a wonderful way of answering questions by asking questions. This lawyer tried to put Jesus on the witness stand and Jesus turned this around to put the lawyer on the witness stand instead...

Jesus responded to the lawyer with this somewhat sarcastic question: *'What does the Law say?'* In other words, 'You are the lawyer who interprets the Law; you tell me what it says.' By this question, Jesus pointed the lawyer back to the commandments of God. If the question was "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" then the answer was simple: keep the law of God. But keeping the Law of God came with this caveat, you must keep it perfectly. On another occasion Jesus made this clear:

Matt 5:48 – *Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

And the Apostle James put it this way:

James 2:10 – *For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.*

The lawyer's response to Jesus' question was actually pretty good: *"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"* – The lawyer was wise enough to know this was the essence of the law. His response was essentially the answer Jesus gave when another lawyer asked Him, *"Which is the great commandment in the Law?"* in Matthew 22:36. Loving God and our neighbors sums up all the Law... the Ten Commandments are essentially how we may love God and our fellow humans.

Can we be saved by keeping the Law?

No... Galatians 2:16 – *a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ*

The purpose of the Law was to reveal to us, if we are honest with ourselves, the impossibility of salvation-by-works... that if we were to have eternal life then we would need a Savior; God Himself would have to save us.

Ephesians 2:8-9 – *For 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.*

It used to bother me how people in Old Testament times could be saved. They had their temple sacrifices but they were never ending. The animal sacrifices could cover their sin but not take them away. But, in the course of my spiritual growth, I came to realize that people in Old Testament times were saved the same way we are saved today: by the grace of God through faith in His provision for eternal life. The animal sacrifices made it clear that the only way our sins could be forgiven was through the shedding of blood and pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Before the cross, people trusted in God for their salvation knowing that it would have something to do with the coming of the Messiah, they just didn't know what. Today, we have the benefit of knowing how God made it possible for our sins to be forgiven, by Jesus dying on the cross in our behalf.

Is it possible to perfectly love God as required in the Law?

No, our natural selfishness will eventually get in the way. So, it is impossible to perfectly fulfill the requirements of the Law while in our mortal bodies.

Romans 3:23 – *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

Later, Paul lamented his own sin nature that all mortals have...

Romans 7:15 – *For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.*

How about loving you neighbor as yourself... can we do that perfectly?

We may be able to come closer to that than loving God perfectly but again our selfish natures will keep us from being perfect in this regard.

Despite our not being able to be perfect, we should not give up trying to love God and others the best we can. It pleases God when we obey the principles behind His Law and it is a necessary part of our relationship with Him. The more we can be like Christ, the closer we'll be to Him.

And applying the principles of the Law is necessary for our sanctification, which is salvation in the here and now. This is where we respond to the Holy Spirit in us to be more like Christ. But our working to please God has absolutely no value in our justification. Our saved status before God was accomplished in the past upon being born again. This was when God resurrected our human spirit and we began trusting in Jesus' death on the cross as full payment for our sin debt.

The lawyer, *wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"* The lawyer measured himself against both commands. He figured that he obeyed the first command well enough, but his keeping of the second commandment depended on how one defined "neighbor."

- This was his first and perhaps greatest mistake was in assuming that he had fulfilled the first commandment.
- Who among us has loved God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind? It is way too easy to be distracted in any one of these areas even when we worship God; not to mention our daily living.

How do you think the lawyer might have wanted Jesus to answer this question?

Your neighbor is someone who lives by you or someone who is in the same social circles like other

lawyers. Someone in your club, church, or in his case, synagogue.

- The lawyer's 2nd mistake: In this question he revealed he didn't perfectly love God...
1 John 4:20 – *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?*

Jesus answered the lawyer's follow-up question to define neighbor with an illustration...

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves: The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was infamous for crime and robbery (per the historian Josephus). So, it wasn't surprising to Jesus' listeners that He set the story on this particular road.

Now by chance a certain priest came down that road: The priest and the Levite (both categories of religious officials) saw their Jewish brother lying in his terrible condition – but neither of them did anything. They both passed by on the other side.

Why do you think the priest and Levite didn't help the man attacked by thieves?

They may have rationalized that their role was too important to take time from their schedule to get involved. Or maybe they thought it could be a trap and they would likewise be attacked if they stopped to help.

One commentator pointed out that the three philosophies of life are represented in this parable:

1. The thieves' philosophy of life was: "what you have is mine." This is essentially the philosophy of socialism, the economy of the coming Antichrist. Don't let anyone try to convince you that socialism is biblical, it is a doctrine of demons.
2. The priest and Levite's philosophy of life was: "What I have is mine." This is rugged individualism that has gone to seed with an attitude of, "let the world be damned, I will hold on to what I have. This is godless capitalism.
3. The Good Samaritan's philosophy of life was: "What I have is yours if I can help you." This is the proper Christian perspective and is distinct from socialism where giving is voluntary, not mandatory which would be stealing.

Why would Jesus show the religious people in this story in less than a favorable light?

God hates religion...

Is 64:6 – *All our righteousness are like filthy rags* No one is justified before God by being self-righteous. Human religions have caused more people to go to hell than anything else in this world:

Matthew 7:21-23 – *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'*

All human religions teach salvation-by-works, the idea that you can earn favor with God for salvation by your good works. I challenge you to find any religion that teaches otherwise.

- Biblical Christianity is so far removed from man's concept of religion that it should not even be considered a religion.... It is more of a relationship with our Savior.

Back to our story: *But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion:* When Jesus' listeners heard about the priest and the Levite, they probably expected Jesus to say next that a common Jewish man came and helped. Then this story would be another way Jesus showed the corruption of the religious leaders were in his day. But Jesus shocked them by saying that the man who helped was a Samaritan.

What do we know about Samaritans?

Generally speaking, Jews and Samaritans despised each other both racially and religiously. Samaritans were originally Jews but they intermarried with Gentiles and were thus corrupted in the eyes of the Jews. The culture gave the Samaritan plenty of reasons to hate this Jewish man and pass him by.

- Some rabbis taught that a Jew was forbidden to help a Gentile woman who was in distress giving birth; because if they succeeded, all they did was to help one more Gentile come into the world. They often thought that Samaritans were worse than other Gentiles were.

How did the Samaritan show compassion?

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: Instead of passing by, the Samaritan loved him sacrificially. He didn't wait to be asked; to see the need right in front of him was enough to make him do something. He also gave freely of both his time and his resources.

- The wine, containing alcohol, had an antiseptic effect on the man's wounds. The oil was like an ointment that helped to soothe the wounds, easing the pain. To set him on his own animal meant that the Samaritan himself walked.

He took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper: It seems that two denarii would provide for the man's needs in the inn for at least two or three weeks.

How is the human condition like the man attacked by thieves?

- The man would die without help.
- The man was unable to help himself.
- Human religions would fail in helping the man.

How was the Samaritan like Jesus?

- He was an outsider, despised by many.
- He came after others failed to meet the need.
- He came right on time, before it was too late.
- He came with everything necessary.
- He came right to the afflicted man.
- He gave tender care.
- He provided for his future needs.

Jesus applies the parable by asking the lawyer, *which of these three do you think was neighbor?* According to the thinking of the day, the priest and the Levite were neighbor to the man who had been beaten and robbed. But they didn't act like neighbors at all.

- Jesus shifted the ground of the question of "who is my neighbor" as not being important as the question "to whom we are a neighbor."

It was obvious to even the lawyer who was the fallen man's neighbor... *he who showed mercy on him:* it is revealing that the lawyer could not bring himself to refer to the hero of the story as a "Samaritan."

Everyone hearing this parable might have expected the Samaritan to be an enemy, but he was instead a neighbor who showed mercy.

What do you think the lawyer thought of this parable?

He probably did not like it at all... he could no longer justify himself because he did not have this kind of love, a love that went beyond what he wanted to think of as "neighbor."

Jesus said, *go and do likewise:* Jesus used the parable to answer the lawyer's question and guide the application. I am to love my neighbor, and my neighbor is the one who others might consider my

enemy. My neighbor is the one with a need right in front of me. Jesus was even more explicit on another occasion:

Matthew 5:44 – I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you

The original Greek word used for love here along with the command to love your neighbor is agape. Unlike the English language, the Greek language has multiple words for different kinds of love. Agape love is the highest form of unconditional, godly love that is the sacrificial kind of love Jesus showed when He paid the penalty for our sins by dying on the cross.

How is the godly agape form of love different from commonly considered love in our culture?

Most people think love is an emotion which can be fleeting, you can fall in and out of love, or it is a transaction where I will love you only if you love me back. But godly agape love is an unconditional, sacrificial act of the will where you love the other person whether they are worthy of your love or not.

If you think it is hard to have sacrificial love for your enemies, you're right. Agape love is not a typical, natural form of love. True agape love is only possible with God's help. Galatians 5:22 says that agape love is one of the fruits of the Spirit that only results from having a right relationship with the Savior Jesus Christ.

Most people in the world today don't have this kind of love for God or others. The president of Russia certainly does not love his neighbors in Ukraine. This war in Europe serves to remind us that we live in a dangerous world without God. Our world sorely needs Jesus, the Prince of Peace to return; I look forward to that day. Meanwhile, God saved us to be His representatives showing the world His love until Jesus returns.

If you have not experienced the agape love of God in your life, just start trusting in God's provision for eternal life. Believe that Jesus paid your sin debt when He died on the cross and demonstrated that His promises will be realized when He rose from the dead. Then you'll experience the abundant life Jesus came to give us. And God will give you the resources to love Him and other people His way. You can't do it apart from having His life in you.

Lets, pray...