

Between Promise and the Cross: Mercy on the Road

Text: Luke 10:25–37

Anchor Truth:

The promises of God always lead us toward the wounded.

Introduction: A Question That Feels Faithful

Our passage begins with a question. Luke writes:

“And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’”

Now that phrase “*to put him to the test*” might sound hostile to us, but the question itself is deeply religious.

This is the kind of question someone asks when they take God seriously.

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

In other words: *What does faithfulness actually look like?*

Jesus answers the way great teachers often do—by asking a question back.

“What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”

The man answers beautifully.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”

And Jesus responds:

“You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live.”

Everything sounds right. The theology is sound. The doctrine is correct. But Luke adds something important.

“But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”

This second question reveals something deeper. He isn’t asking out of curiosity. He is asking out of **containment**. He wants boundaries.

He wants to know where responsibility ends. He wants to know who counts—and who doesn't. Because if we can define the limits of love, we can control the cost of obedience. And if we're honest, that instinct lives in us too.

We want a faith that is clear enough to follow but narrow enough to manage. But the Lord has a way of unsettling that desire. Because Jesus often answers our questions in ways that expand our responsibility instead of shrinking it.

Movement 1: Love That Sounds Right

Jesus begins with what the lawyer already knows. Love God completely. Love your neighbor as yourself. This is the heart of the law. But notice what Jesus says next.

“Do this, and you will live.”

The issue is not knowledge. The issue is embodiment. The lawyer knows the right answer. But knowing the right answer is not the same thing as living it.

There's a difference between **knowing about love and practicing love**. You can read books about **swimming**, understand the physics of water, memorize every stroke technique—and never actually swim if you never enter the water. Faith works the same way.

You can know Scripture. You can quote theology. You can agree with truth. But until love becomes something you practice, faith remains theoretical.

And the Lord presses us here. Because He invites us to ask: *Where has faith remained in my head but not yet reached my hands? In what areas?*

Movement 2: A Wounded Man on the Road

Jesus tells a story. “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho...”

This road was notoriously dangerous. It descended steeply through rocky desert terrain. Robbers hid among the cliffs. Travelers knew the risks. And in the story, the worst happens. The man is attacked. Stripped. Beaten.

Left half dead. This is not abstract suffering. It is visible, urgent, uncomfortable need.

Have you ever seen someone in need and immediately felt that inner tension? You see a broken-down car. Someone stranded. A person asking for help. And in a split second your mind fills with competing thoughts:

*What if this is dangerous? What if I'm being taken advantage of?
What if I get involved and it becomes complicated?*

And suddenly the road forks in front of you. One direction leads toward involvement. The other leads toward distance. Jesus is describing exactly that moment.

When we come up against these moments, there is that tension between the choice to engage and that inner hesitation.

Jesus places suffering directly in the path of the story. And that's intentional. Because discipleship does not happen only in worship services or in Sunday school classes. It happens on the road.

Movement 3: Passing By for Good Reasons

Jesus continues. "Now by chance a priest was going down that road..."

Surely the priest will help. But Luke says: "When he saw him he passed by on the other side."

Then a Levite arrives. Another religious man. Another servant of God. He also sees the man. And he also passes by. Notice something important. Jesus does not accuse them of cruelty. Their failure is not hatred.

Their failure is **distance**. They saw the need. But they chose not to enter it.

A pastor once said, "Most people do not resist compassion because they lack sympathy. They resist compassion because they fear interruption."

Mercy is inconvenient. Mercy disrupts plans. Mercy requires margin we often do not have. And sometimes we hide behind very reasonable explanations.

“I’m too busy.” “I’m not qualified.” “I wouldn’t know what to say.” “I’m sure someone else will step in.”

And Jesus quietly asks us: *How often do good reasons become excuses to avoid costly love?*

Movement 4: Mercy from the Margins

Then Jesus introduces the third traveler. “But a Samaritan...”

This would have shocked the original audience. Samaritans and Jews had generations of hostility between them. But Jesus says something remarkable: “He was moved with compassion.”

And compassion becomes action. The Samaritan stops. He approaches the wounded man. He touches him. He cleans wounds with oil and wine. He bandages injuries. He lifts the man onto his own animal. He walks instead. He pays for the man’s care. And promises to return.

This is not casual kindness. This is costly mercy.

Compassion literally means “**to suffer with.**” It means allowing someone else’s pain to interrupt your comfort. It means stepping into a story that isn’t convenient.

Chocolate stars story. I remember my dad showing sacrificial compassion to all three of us boys. And later, as we would laugh off the “Chocolate Star” incident, I realized that mercy carried a cost for my dad. He was already running on fumes, and yet he basically sacrificed a night’s sleep for us. Mercy always carries a cost. And it is a cost we usually are willing to pay for our loved ones, like my dad. But will we pay it for someone else we don’t know as well? Someone we’ve never met? That is what the Samaritan in the story did.

Gospel Connection: The Deeper Meaning of the Story

But there is something even deeper happening in this story. Many scholars have noticed something profound. In some ways, **we are the wounded traveler.**

Humanity is the one lying on the road. Sin has beaten us. Brokenness has stripped us. This world of sin has left us for dead. Nothing was able to rescue us. Religious systems pass by. Good intentions pass by. Human effort passes by. But then Jesus comes.

Like the Samaritan, he enters our suffering. He draws near to us. He binds our wounds. And the cost of that mercy was not two coins at an inn. It was a cross. On the cross, Jesus paid the price for our healing. He died for our sin. He rose again to give us life. And the invitation of the gospel is simple:

Trust him. Receive his mercy. Let him rescue you. Before we can become people who show mercy, we must first become people who **receive mercy**.

Movement 5: The Question Turned Inside Out

Jesus returns to the lawyer's question. But he changes it. The lawyer asked: "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus asks: "Which of these proved to be a neighbor?"

Do you hear the shift? The lawyer wanted to define **who deserves love**. Jesus defines **what love does**.

Neighbor is not a category. Neighbor is a way of living. It is what happens when mercy crosses the road.

The lawyer answers: "The one who showed mercy." And Jesus says: "Go and do likewise."

Bringing It Together

Throughout this sermon series we've been asking the following questions:

Week one: Will you follow Jesus?

Week two: Will you trust the One who sends you?

Week three asks: Will you love the people you encounter along the way?

Because the road of discipleship always leads through places where people are hurting. And if we walk with Jesus long enough, we will encounter people who are wounded. People who are lonely. People who are struggling.

People who need compassion. And the temptation will always be to keep walking. But the promises of God always draw us toward the wounded.

Final Conclusion: The Road of Mercy

Imagine that road again. Dust rising. Heat pressing down. A wounded man lying in the ditch. And three travelers approaching. Two see and pass by. One sees and stops. Jesus tells this story not simply to teach morality.

He tells it to reveal the **shape of discipleship**. Because the road Jesus walks is always lined with people in need of mercy. And disciples do not walk past them.

So, the question for us is not: “Who qualifies as my neighbor?”

The question is: *Where is God inviting me to stop?*

Who is the wounded person on your road right now?

A struggling coworker? A hurting neighbor? A family member who feels forgotten? A stranger whose pain you have noticed but avoided? Jesus does not ask us to fix every broken person in the world. But he does invite us to stop for someone.

To see. To be moved. To act.

Because when the people of God live this way, the world begins to see what the kingdom of God looks like. A kingdom where mercy crosses the road.