

Luke 10:25-37
The Good Samaritan
6/21/2020

We are going to Luke 10 today. We'll start by reading our passage, a familiar passage to many of you:

Luke 10 25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 27 And he answered, "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." 28 And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." 29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

The story of the good Samaritan is a story that nearly everyone knows, and the moral is clear: be helpful like the Samaritan. And this story does say that and teach that, but there is so much more to be gleaned here. Here we find not only the command to do good to others, but specifics on how to do good, the motivation for doing good, and the key to the kind of change of heart that can make us like the Samaritan here.

There is much here, so we'll walk through this passage bite by bite in the hopes of having our souls fed on one of the greatest texts of scripture:

Luke 10 25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

So here's the setting. Jesus is being questioned by a lawyer. We hear lawyer and we think Celino and Barnes. (Call 454-2020). Or "Hurt in a Car, call" - William Mattar. And those of you who are old enough remember Jim, the Hammer, Shapiro.

So we picture a lawyer like that questioning Jesus, so we might call to mind a picture of a TV lawyer here. But remember that in Israel there was no separation of church and state, and the law of the land came from the Bible. So a lawyer, an expert in the law, or a scribe, was a biblical scholar. Now he applied the law of the land, the bible, to the civic life of the people, so he did some of what lawyers do today. But he was a religious holy man. So a cross between a lawyer and a pastor.

And he comes, not with sincere motives to learn from Jesus, but wanting to test Jesus. Word had spread about the wisdom of Jesus - how even as a 12 year old boy he put the lawyers to shame with his learning and knowledge. Now this lawyer says, "He's an expert, huh? I'll put him to the test."

So his test question is "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He's not really concerned for his soul and relationship with God, there's no seeking after God here, but just a test to see if Jesus is as good at Bible as he is. (So often, as church people, we might like to be good at Bible but not so concerned with Christ Himself or the state of our souls.)

So to test Jesus he asks "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus has been preaching about this eternal kingdom, so this man asks what can you do to inherit eternal life? How does someone live a life that makes them worthy of eternity with God?

So Jesus answers his question with another question:

Luke 10:26 He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"

Jesus turns the tables on this man and does the questioning himself. Jesus will administer the quiz here, Jesus is the teacher in this relationship. So he asks him how he reads the law.

He turns this lawyer to the place they both agree the answers will be found - the law of God, the Bible. Jesus and the lawyer agree that the place they go for answers is to the book God has given. (Which, by the way, is the place Jesus calls us to continue to go for answers today.) So the lawyer, who knows his bible, presents his summary of all that God's law demands in verse 27:

Luke 10:27 And he answered, "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."

These two commandments were given in the Old Testament:

Deuteronomy 6:5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Leviticus 19:18 "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."

And this lawyer knew the law well. He knew that these were the big commands, and all the other commands were just applications of these two. If you keep these two commands, you keep all of the law. Elsewhere, Jesus agreed that these two commands are the commands that all the others hang on. If you love God with all of your heart mind soul and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself, you will automatically obey all the other commands.

Because to love God with all your heart means all of your emotions will love God.

To love God with all of your soul means your whole consciousness will be attuned to loving God.

To love God with all of your strength means all of your drive will be focused on obeying him.

To love God with all of your mind means your cognitive abilities will all be used in his service.

We'd keep all the commandments if we lived like that. (We wouldn't take God's name in vain, we would have no other God before Him, we'd tithe, we'd be thankful, our inner life would be transformed - all of the commands about our relationship with God would be satisfied if we loved him like this.)

And then to love your neighbor as yourself, well, we all love ourselves well - we clothe, feed, look out for, think about ourselves. To love others like that would mean we would never sin against them in any of the ways we're commanded to steer clear of in the law. We wouldn't steal, we would care for the poor, we'd not commit adultery, we'd not covet what belongs to a neighbor. If we loved a neighbor as ourselves we'd obey all the other commands about our neighbors.

So this man, rightly, identifies the two core commandments that all of the other commands are wrapped up in. So Jesus starts by commending him:

28 And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

So again, Jesus shows that he is the one administering the quiz here. The lawyer comes and tests Jesus, Jesus turns the tables and tests him, and now gives him a gold star for getting his answer right. The man had rightly identified the way to eternal life - perfectly love God and neighbor. He nailed it.

Sort of.

This is the answer for how, hypothetically, someone could be worthy of eternal life. Love God with everything you are and have perfectly, love your neighbor perfectly. Yes, that kind of perfect life gets you into heaven.

But does anyone really hear that and think that it presents any real possibility for us to obey it and go to heaven? We have long since blown it. This is true, but what good does this advice do us now?

Last week, we took the family swimming at a friend's house, and I wasn't paying attention, and I got a sunburn. I'm 42, and I've had my complexion for 42 years, so I should have been alert to this possibility by now. But, I failed. And it wasn't too uncomfortable until the next day, it started itching. And it was unlike any itch I had ever had - intense and deep, like ants crawling all over my shoulders, and scratching gave less than a second of relief. It was intense and crazy-making.

So I googled - looking for anything I could find to stop it. And I learned that there is something that's called "Hell's itch." And I thought, "That seems like an appropriate description." So I click the link, and there is no guaranteed remedy. Benadryl might help. But for the most part the article went on to talk about how you shouldn't get sunburned.

Which is good advice. But I'm not clicking the article about hell's itch because I'm considering getting sunburn and want to know how bad that could be. I've already gotten burned. And the article only served to reinforce the fact that I shouldn't be getting sunburn and that this syndrome is really uncomfortable. I thought I would find a cure for my itch, but I only found information that would have been useful yesterday.

And this lawyer essentially asks, "What's the cure for my itch." The answer is "don't get sunburned." But what good does that do now? What's the way to life? Love God and neighbor so much that you never sin. OK, but what now?

Who has loved God like that? And who can say he has loved his neighbor just as much as he has loved himself?

So what is this law supposed to do? It is supposed to create desperation that sends us running to Jesus to save us. We are supposed to say, "I haven't done this! I need someone to do this for me somehow!" And Jesus did this for us, he paid the price for our sin, he endured the wrath we deserve.

We will either respond to the law by running to Jesus to save us, or, we will try to find some way around the high requirements, and try to find some way to justify ourselves with the law.

The law is like a prescription for us to go to Jesus for salvation. But we tend to try to eat the prescription pad and hope it will cure us as opposed to taking it to get the medicine we need.

So he immediately looks for a loophole:

Luke 10: 29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

So this man wants to justify himself. He wants to find his salvation in the law somehow. And at first glance, the command to love a neighbor as myself, sounds like an impossibly high demand and there are so many neighbors. So maybe I could just limit the law's demand on my life - if I could limit its requirement.

So he asks, "Who is my neighbor?"

If it's the person who lives right next door, maybe he could make the case that he has loved his neighbor well. People in his neighborhood, or maybe if he is incredibly philanthropic, he could make the case that all of the nation of Israel has been loved well by him.

He wants to justify himself. He wants to make himself just, he wants to save himself. So he asks, just to be sure, who his neighbor is.

And Jesus replies with this story:

30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.

So Jesus tells the story of a man who was walking alone on a dangerous road. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a difficult one. It was 17 miles long, and fairly steep, it descended over 3000 feet in altitude. It wound through the desert and there were long, dangerous stretches that were known as the bad part of town, where robberies were a regular occurrence.

One stretch was called, loosely translated, "the pass of blood"¹, because things like this happened there often.

And sure enough, this guy should have known better, but he passed through there and was robbed, stripped, and left half-dead on the side of the road. But he was in luck, because (verse 31):

31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road (great news, surely this religious man who worked in the temple worshipping God would help!), **and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.**

So the pious priest, rather than help, walks to the other side of the road. Maybe he didn't know if the man was alive (half-dead probably looks a lot like all dead), and he didn't want to be defiled by touching a corpse. He had to serve in the temple, and he couldn't do that duty if he touched a dead person. So he moves to the other side of the road and passes by.

¹ Mentioned in Joshua 18:17.

32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

He doesn't get help from the religious elite. So you would expect Jesus to then talk about a regular old Jew, a layman without the religious credentials, who stops to help. That would fit some of the tensions that were going on between Jesus and the religious leaders.

But

33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.

A Samaritan has compassion. These Samaritans were the worst people to the Jews. To eat with a Samaritan was considered defiling. To eat with a Samaritan would have been like eating pork for an observant Jew, it would make them unclean.

Remember just a couple of passages ago, the Samaritans rejected Jesus on his way to Jerusalem and wouldn't provide lodging for Him. So the disciples ask permission to call down fire from heaven to judge them.

The Samaritans rejected most of the Jewish Bible, they rejected worship in the temple at Jerusalem, they rejected King David, they rejected the Messiah, they had their own culty temple set up in Gerizim. Even Jesus had said that Samaritan theology wasn't right (John 4:27).

And there was bad blood between them. When the Jews came back from captivity to rebuild the temple, the Samaritans harassed them by throwing dead pigs into the temple area, which contaminated it and slowed their work. There had been a war with the Samaritans about 150 years ago. The Jews had no dealings with Samaritans - these were in Jewish eyes morally bankrupt people all the way to the bottom.

And Jesus makes the despised one, the Samaritan, the good guy in this story.

The Jewish religious leaders tried to get out of their obligation by walking on the other side of the road and saying, "I'm not his neighbor - he isn't my responsibility," just like this lawyer was trying to get out of his obligation to love his neighbor and to justify himself.

He wants to have his religious knowledge and credentials, but wants to limit the demands of the law on his life to the smallest pool of people possible.

So the lawyer is trying to get out of having to love some people, and Jesus reveals that he is not even as good as a righteous samaritan with that attitude. He hasn't come close to what God demands of him.

The demand to love your neighbor isn't limited, there's no such thing as a non-neighbor.

So what does God demand?

What does the command to love our neighbor look like when we're fulfilling it?

34 He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'

He does five things, and we are called to these five things to say we've really loved someone well:

- 1) He approaches him. He doesn't stay on the other side of the road, but goes up close to really see what's going on with this guy. Is he dead? What help does he need? He approaches. This is a risk for him! This could be a trap! He could be beaten up too.

To love people is to move toward need, and to take some risks to do so.

- 2) He binds his wounds. He stops the bleeding. He helps with the biggest needs first. But he doesn't leave it there.
- 3) He anoints him with oil and wine. The wine, though he wouldn't have known this, would disinfect. The oil would soothe his pain.
- 4) He puts him on his mule. So now the Samaritan has to walk this treacherous road. He gives up his ease so the man can live. Life is harder for the Samaritan so he can bless the injured man.

Love is costly. We tend to care for people out of our extra and our abundance. Our generosity comes out of the extra money we have after we've loved and taken care of ourselves. But this man accepts less for himself so he can give more to another.

5) He takes him to the inn and provides for his care and comfort. The daily rate at a hotel for a poor man was 1/12 of a denarius. He pays 2 denarii, or 24 nights' stay there at the inn. And on top of that, he pays for his medical care, and guarantees if there's anything left, he'll pay that too.

And in the greek here he is forceful and emphatic. "I will pay, not the man, no, never." He makes him whole at his own expense.

And this generosity would have saved him from slavery. If you couldn't pay your bills in the ancient world, you became a slave.

That's real love for someone in need.

We speak out, we tweet. We feel bad. We act indignant at the injustice. Which is all fine, but none of it even comes close to obeying the law that we love a neighbor as ourselves. This Samaritan, at great cost to himself, at great risk to his life, at a great inconvenience, loves this man.

Jesus says we should do likewise.

So let's pause and ask ourselves what our love for our neighbors looks like.

Love that costs? Love that risks? Love that works to make a person whole? Love that is inconvenienced? Is our generosity such that it means less for us so there can be more for someone else?

It is love that is willing to take a chance that our love will not be reciprocated, or even that we'll be used and deceived?

Or is it social media love? That tweets, and acts indignant, but never sacrifices. Never moves toward someone in need.

Do we have the faux love of the religious people who want to be known as holy, known as good, but aren't actually good and holy. We can tweet so everyone knows we are indignant at an injustice but never actually care in a costly way for the victim.

The Samaritan didn't tweet anything. He got close to the victim, he cared for his needs, he sacrifices his own comfort for the good of another. It wasn't a display, he wasn't trying to justify himself and prove himself really righteous, he just did good.

So Jesus tells this story, and now he asks another question to this lawyer:

36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"

Now the answer is obviously the Samaritan. But this lawyer can't even conceive of a good Samaritan. There can't be a good samaritan. If you're a Samaritan you're not good and if you're good you're not a Samaritan! There's no such thing in his mind.

So the lawyer can't bring himself to even say that the Samaritan was good. He couldn't ever utter the phrase "the good Samaritan."

So, verse 37:

37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Who was the neighbor? The merciful one. Let's not even acknowledge that he's a samaritan, let's treat that detail like Jesus never said it. The one who showed him mercy was the neighbor.

And Jesus says, "You go, do likewise."

Be like him.

So the lawyer, who thinks he is religious elite, and if anyone deserves eternal life, it's him, is now told that he should be more like a Samaritan.

And notice how the Samaritan in the story is willing to love his enemy, the jew in the ditch. But this righteous Jewish teacher can't bring himself to love a Samaritan. The Samaritan is better than the holy religious man.

What a mind-scrambling encounter with Jesus this must have been!

He goes into it feeling good about himself, like he understands God's law and has kept it pretty well. And he is sent away told to be more like a Samaritan and that he doesn't obey God's law anywhere near as well as a Samaritan does, and a Samaritan denies the validity of much of God's law.

What an incredible amount of humility it would take for this teacher of the law to receive this teaching of Jesus.

And if he did receive it, he would be admitting that he isn't worthy of eternal life.

So in telling this parable, Jesus is doing a few things.

One, he is telling us the meaning of God's law, and showing us what is required of us. This command for us to love not just our next-door neighbors, not just our countrymen, not just people just like us, and this command to love thoroughly and with action and at great cost to ourselves sums up the law of God toward our neighbor. Love like that.

And it is this parable that has spawned 2000 years of radical mercy ministry on behalf of Christians. This is why Christians feed and clothe and provide medical care, and help those who are laid off, and care for the sick and vulnerable and at risk. This is why we have a history of building hospitals and schools and wells and food banks. This is why we rescue the unborn, why we support adoption, this is why we oppose racism, this is why we heal the broken in all kinds of ways. Because Jesus told this story and said, go and do likewise.

So this is the pinnacle of all Christian ethical teaching - live like this. Love like this.

But if we hear this rightly, we are humbled.

Because *who loves like that?* Not me. We love with self-interest. We love with limits. We love with boundaries. We love out of our surplus. We can't look back and say we've loved our neighbor as ourselves, let alone love God with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and strength.

We're supposed to hear this and say "nobody can inherit eternal life then!"

Which leads us to the other layer of this story.

When we ask, "Who loves like that?" we are supposed to answer, "There's One."

Remember Luke 9:51 that set the stage for everything in the rest of this book.

Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem, it tells us. In Jerusalem, Jesus would be crucified for the sins of the world.

For people like us, who are not just half-dead, but all dead spiritually.

1) He approached us - he came near. Not just at great risk to his own life, but at the definite cost of his own life. He took on flesh and dwelt among us, He came near.

2) He bound our wounds and soothed the pain our sin had caused.

3) He accepted less for Himself so He could give more to us. He poured out his life so we could have life. He gave all that He had, all the way to the bottom, so we could live.

4) He paid the full price for our healing.

We might try to contribute with our religion and good works, thinking maybe Jesus could go part way and we could go part way and then we could inherit life.

But Jesus, forcefully, emphatically, says, "No, not Him. Not her. Me. I'll pay every dime."

And then He dies, alone, bearing the full weight of our sin. Dying like someone who had broken God's law.

So that we could be treated like someone who had perfectly loved God and man.

Jesus took the money in his pocket, His own perfect righteousness, and credited it all to our account.

He rescued us from death, freed us from slavery.

And to do it, he became despised like a Samaritan.

Jesus is the truly good Samaritan.

And any of us who have come to believe in Him and received his forgiveness and grace are like the person who was beat up, in the ditch, left for dead, but we received undeserved mercy and grace that restored us completely.

And it's only when we believe in what the truly good neighbor has done for us that we can ever find the grace and compassion to live like that toward others.

This story is loaded with ethical commands, with a high calling for our life. But also with the oil and wine that we need for healing. And the internal motivator and change agent to make us people who can love more like the Samaritan did.

When the gospel softens our heart, and when we remember the gospel story and see those who are in need around us as people who need grace and mercy just like we received, we are far more ready to move toward them, to love sacrificially, and to live in real love for God and people.

And in the cross we have the template for how we are supposed to love, too. It's good to love with our words, our statements, and even with our tweets. But we have to remember that when Jesus told us he loved us, he actually loved us first at the cross. He wasn't all talk. He made a huge sacrifice, demonstrating love, delivering love to us, giving his mercy to us, and then His words came to us. Let us not love in word only, John tells us, but in word and deed.